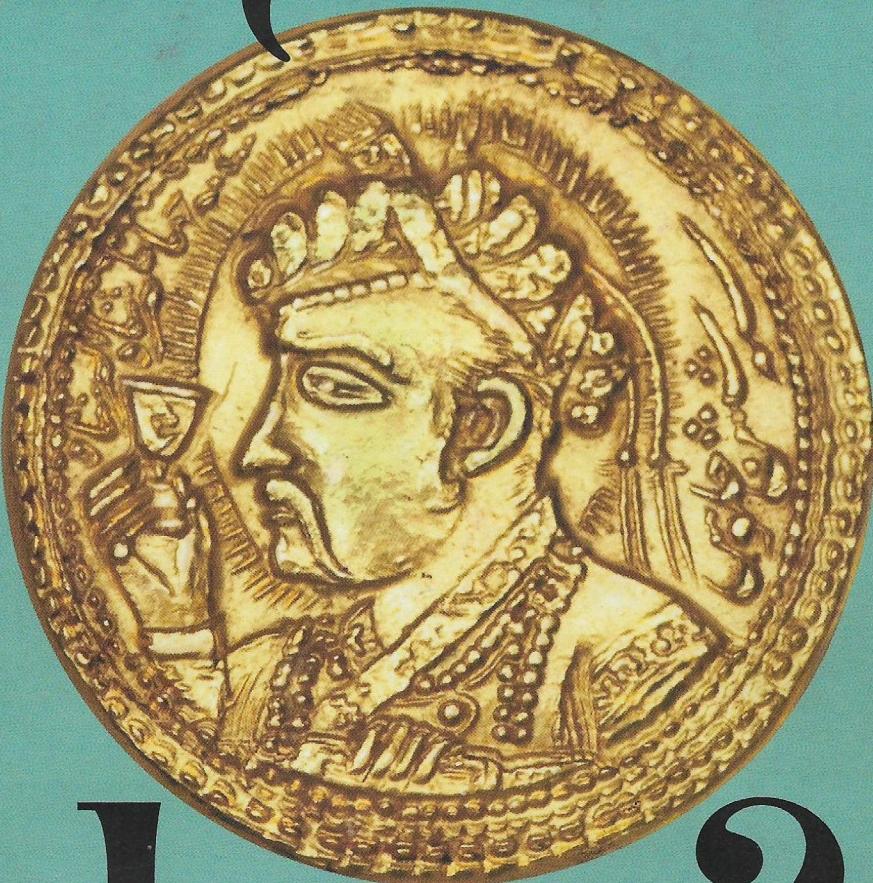


What is Islam?



The Importance of Being Islamic

Shahab Ahmed

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Princeton and Oxford

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey
08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street, Woodstock,
Oxfordshire OX20 1TW

press.princeton.edu
Jacket image © Heritage Auctions.

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ISBN 978-0-691-16418-2
Library of Congress Control Number: 2015948828

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Linux Libertino O

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Analysis is the distinguishing of things that exist sound and true in combination—but that have become confused in the mind—in such a way that each of them is rendered separate from the others in its potential and in its definition; or in such a way that each of them comes to indicate the existence of the other, so that when one considers the state of one of them, one is transported from the one to the other.

—Al-Shaykh al-Rā’īs Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā
[Avicenna] (980–1037 A.D.)

They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.

—Heraclitus (*fl. ca. 487–521 B.C.*)

For my parents,
who raised me in the Islam of their cosmopolitanism
and in the cosmopolitanism of their Islam

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Preface

THE FIRST DRAFT of this book was written between January 2012 and September 2013 while I was teaching fulltime as Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard University. A visiting appointment as Lecturer on Law and Research Fellow in the Islamic Legal Studies Program at Harvard Law School in the academic year 2014–15 enabled me to revise the manuscript between July 2014 and November 2014.

In making revisions, I deliberately chose not to look at any material published in 2014 (and it is likely also that I have missed some salient material published in 2013 that was slow to come to hand). I apologize to any authors I have neglected, and to my readers for any shortfall that this has incurred.

This book draws on a range of primary source material translated from various languages. Unless otherwise indicated in the footnotes, all the translations have been done by me—but not without the privilege of having consulted expert friends and colleagues who have graciously disputed, corrected, confirmed, or simply tolerated my renderings: Mohsen Goudarzi (Arabic and Persian), Moeen Lashari, Amer Latif and Hasher Ahmed Majoka (Panjabi, Siraiki, and Urdu), Sukidi Mulyadi (Javanese and Malay), Himmet Taşkömür (Ottoman), and Muḥammad Muhsin Khān and Sayyid Muhammad Khālid (Pashtō). I am most grateful.

I have provided full transliterations of all those passages from primary texts that I have translated in Chapter 1, since these passages are foundational to the argument. In subsequent chapters, in the interest of making the book no longer than necessary, I have only supplied transliterations *ḥasab al-darūrah*. Rather than follow any single established transliteration system, I have followed the principle that the original orthography (*rasm al-khaṭṭ*) should be represented as far as is sensible, and thus be readily apparent to the reader. I should note that in transliterating *vowels* from Persian, I have followed the historical South Asian pronunciation in which I myself “hear” the language—I apologize to native speakers of modern Persian for any auditory distress that this may cause them.

I thank Scott Walker at the Harvard Map Collection for patiently and skillfully preparing the map that appears in this book. My deep thanks go to my friend and colleague Michael Grossman for all variety of “bookman’s” help. I am especially grateful to the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon; the Walters Museum in Baltimore; and to Sayyid Irfan al-Alawi, Director of the Is-

Iamic Heritage Research Foundation, Mecca, for allowing me to reproduce photographs from their collections without charge (I am indebted to Amina Chaudary for putting me in touch with Dr al-Alawi), and to “Mardetanha” for making his photograph of the *Jannat al-baqī* available on Wikimedia Commons. Abolala Soudavar kindly permitted me to reproduce an image from the Art and History Trust Collection. I should like also to record my thanks to Massumeh Farhad, Elizabeth Stein, Betsy Kohut, and Simon Rettig at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., for supplying me with an image on *very* short notice, and to acknowledge the efficient co-operation of the staff of the British Museum, the Rare Books Division at Princeton University library, the Sackler Collection at Harvard Art Museums, and the Fine Arts Library of Harvard University.

This book is a culmination of innumerable conversations down the years with friends, fellow-dwellers and fellow-travelers in various places across the world: in Cairo and Cambridge, Konya and Kuala Lumpur, London and Lahore, Marrakech and Montreal, New York and New Delhi, Islamabad and Istanbul, Boston and Berlin, Sarajevo and Singapore, Amsterdam and Amman, Damascus and Durham, Princeton and Port of Spain, Valletta and Villasimius, Granada and Gilgit. Many of these conversations were with Dana Sajdi to whom I will always be grateful for the many things that she has taught me and has helped me to see.

Only at an advanced stage in the writing of this book did I realize that I had first formulated several of its fundamental ideas, albeit in *very* nascent form, in a plenary lecture entitled “‘Ajā’ ib al-Hind, *Armaghān-i Hijāz*: Reading Islam across South Asia and the Middle East,” given at the University of California at Santa Barbara Center for Middle East Studies’ Inaugural Symposium on “The Middle East and South Asia: Comparative Perspectives” in February 2001. I am grateful to the organizers of that conference for inviting me to speak my thoughts at a stage of my intellectual life when I knew and understood so little. The academic year 2007–8, which I spent as a Higher Education Commission of Pakistan Visiting Scholar at the Islamic Research Institute in Islamabad under the patronage of that gracious ‘ālim, Zafar Ishaq Ansari, gave me the opportunity to think about and to discuss with a variety of my fellow-countrymen in offices and libraries, *baythaks* and drawing-rooms, bookshops and rug-shops, *madrasahs* and mosques, tomb-shrines and gardens, on mountainsides and in village orchards, in the desert and by the river, over tea and with hookahs, on sofas and on *charpoys*, a range of the living issues that eventually informed this project.

But what finally provoked this book was my collaboration with my friend and colleague, Nenad Filipovic, on another book, *Neither Paradise nor Hell-*

fire: Seeing Islam through the Ottomans, Seeing the Ottomans through Islam. When I had completed the writing of two-thirds of a draft of *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire*, I began to sketch out a brief introductory essay for that book which grew relentlessly (and, for a time, it appeared interminably) into *What Is Islam?* I apologize to Nenad for the long delay in the completion of our joint project that has resulted from my writing *What Is Islam?* Even more, I thank him for the ways in which his unique erudition and peculiar genius have educated, challenged and inspired me to re-conceive of what scholarship should be, and for how his blunt refusal at any cost ever to be intimidated by scholarly reputation or to tolerate scholarly pretence has given me the confidence decisively to understand the importance of locating and speaking in my own voice.

Four seminars taught at Harvard University between 2009 and 2012, one on Ibn ‘Arabī, another entitled “Islam, Metaphor and Meaning,” a third on “Public, Private and Islam,” and a fourth (at Harvard Law School) on “The Social and Cultural Lives of Islamic Law,” along with my regular seminar on “Orthodoxy: Truth and Authority” (taught both in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and at Harvard Law School), provided me with the pretext to read a number of important and highly suggestive works, and presented me a forum in which to talk through with my students numerous points treated in this book. Four lectures given at intervals of approximately sixth months, the first in the Colloquium of the Committee on the Study of Religion at Harvard University in April 2012, the second at the Faculty Research Workshop of Harvard Law School in November 2012, the third as a keynote address at a symposium entitled “Tracing Encounters” at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University in May 2013, and the fourth in the Comparative Muslim Societies Seminar of the Department of History at Cornell University in November 2013, furnished me with the opportunity to present my developing ideas to learned audiences. The questions posed to me on each of those occasions (especially the ones that I answered badly on the day!) subsequently proved invaluable for the articulation of the arguments in this book.

I am indebted to colleagues who have talked through various aspects of this project with me at different stages: Noah Feldman, Amer Latif, Charles Lockwood, and Parimal Patil. Sukidi Mulyadi has subtly opened for me the door to more than one corridor of analysis, while Hasher Ahmed Majoka has thrust me unceremoniously through others. Early on in the undertaking, I had a chastening and most instructive conversation about “culture” with two patient anthropologists, Rosemarie Bernard and Nur Yalman. And a few days after my lecture at McGill, I was subjected to a long evening of interrogation

at Cambridge Common by Nora Lessersohn and Walter Young. I am grateful to all my interlocutors, both for their pains and for mine.

I have been privileged, truly, to receive wide-ranging, thoughtful, and immensely helpful criticisms of the first draft of the manuscript from the four learned readers of diverse scholarly specializations appointed as reviewers by Princeton University Press: Engseng Ho, Alexander Knysh, Robert Wissnovsky, and Muhammad Qasim Zaman. I offer them my humble thanks. I am, further, forever in the debt of those friends and colleagues who read the entire manuscript at my request and who, between them, pointed out a raft of shortcomings: Michael Cook, Noah Feldman, Mohsen Goudarzi, William Graham, Aslıhan Gürbüzel, Moeen Lashari, Nora Lessersohn, Rebecca Linder-Blachly, Hasher Ahmed Majoka, Sukidi Mulyadi, Amr Osman, Erum Khalid Sattar, Asma Sayeed, Nicholas Watson, and Nur Yalman. Chapter 1 benefited also from close reading by Houchang Chehabi and by Walter Young.

My editor at Princeton University Press, Fred Appel, believed me when I told him that I was writing a “short book”, and continued to believe *in me* as the manuscript became ever-less short. I am deeply appreciative of his forbearance, equanimity, and unfailing courtesy. I thank my production editor, Kathleen Cioffi, and copyeditors, Elizabeth Bishop, Michael Lesley, and Andrew Watkins.

I record my particular gratitude to my sister, Shahla Ahmed, and my brother-in-law, Richard Tilling, for, more than once, selflessly taking it upon themselves to attend to pressing family matters thereby allowing me the time needed to finish writing up the book. And, I would not have had the strength to complete this project without the constant support of my friends and brothers-in-Islam, Moeen Lashari and Hasher Ahmed Majoka.

Nora Lessersohn sustained me—while, somehow, sustaining herself—throughout the writing of this book. I do not know whether she secretly embraced the prayer of our six-year-old friend, Mina, who handed her a sheet of paper with the handwritten words, “Please make my partner not talk what he writes,” but I do know that she patiently re-listened to every idea, carefully re-read every word, and brutally re-appraised every argument. I fear that, as a result of dealing with the author of this book, she has now all too abundantly realized, both in principle and in practice, the importance of the Islamic value of being *min al-ṣābirīn*.

Shahab Ahmed
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
MARCH 2015

Postscript: In the month between the submission of the final manuscript and the arrival of the compositor's proofs, I fell ill and was thus rendered unable to perform the many tasks related to the production of a final copy. As a consequence, some remaining corrections and additions were unable to be executed. I am deeply grateful for the extraordinary generosity of those friends and colleagues who volunteered to undertake various aspects of the final proofreading: Sunil Sharma, who reviewed the extensive Persian transliterations; Andrew Watkins, who read through the entire copy; and Noah Feldman, who not only read the entire set of proofs for substance and copy, but assumed the time-consuming responsibility of collating the corrections noted by the indexer and other readers. Without them, this book would not now exist. Gülru Necipoğlu and Cemal Kafadar graciously awarded me an affiliation with the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture for 2015–16, thereby ensuring that the book not be published as an institutional orphan. My wife, Nora Lessersohn, did everything else.

PART ONE

Questions

What Is “Islam”?

Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then, I contradict myself.
(I am large, I contain multitudes).

—Walt Whitman¹

SOME YEARS AGO, I attended a dinner at Princeton University where I witnessed a revealing exchange between an eminent European philosopher who was visiting from Cambridge, and a Muslim scholar who was seated next to him. The Muslim colleague was indulging in a glass of wine. Evidently troubled by this, the distinguished don eventually asked his dining companion if he might be so bold as to venture a personal question. “Do you consider yourself a Muslim?” “Yes,” came the reply. “How come, then, you are drinking wine?” The Muslim colleague smiled gently. “My family have been Muslims for a thousand years,” he said, “during which time we have *always* been drinking wine.” An expression of distress appeared on the learned logician’s pale countenance, prompting the further clarification: “You see, we are *Muslim* wine-drinkers.” The questioner looked bewildered. “I don’t understand,” he said. “Yes, I know,” replied his native informant, “but I do.”



Some non-Muslim friends of mine spent a long afternoon at the magnificent “New Galleries of the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia” at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. They gushed at the dazzling richness and variety of the artifacts on display, and expressed the hope that, after seeing first-hand that Muslims were capable of such exquisite expressions of beauty, Americans and others would emerge better disposed towards Islam. “But there is just one thing I didn’t understand,” one

¹ Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” *Leaves of Grass*, New York: Modern Library, 1993 (being the “Death-bed Edition” of 1892), 113.

of them, an executive at the *New York Times*, said to me. “If it’s not an inappropriate question: what did these objects actually *mean* to the people in the societies where they originate? What is this art actually about? What does it have to do with Islam?”



An Arab friend of mine tells the story of her engagement to her South Asian future husband. The prospective fathers-in-law, who had never met, had to speak to each other by means of an international telephone call to formalize the matter. Neither spoke the other’s native language, both spoke some English—but not especially well—and neither was familiar with the other’s culture. The Arab gentleman was a self-declared agnostic, while the South Asian practiced a semi-observant sort of traditional piety of the variety I once heard characterized by the expression “He says his prayers just often enough to keep his wife happy!” Needless to say, given this state of mutual foreignness, my friend was more than a little apprehensive as to how the conversation would unfold. “What happened?” she asked her father as soon as it was over, “Did you understand each other?” “Of course we understood each other,” he replied, “We are both Muslims.”

Six Questions about Islam

Islām, submission, total surrender (to God) *māṣdar* [verbal noun] of the IVth form of the root *S L M*. The “one who submits to God” is the *Muslim*.

—*Encyclopaedia of Islam*¹

After their Prophet, the people disagreed about many things; some of them led others astray, while some dissociated themselves from others. Thus, they became distinct groups and disparate parties—except that Islam gathers them together and encompasses them all.

—Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (874–936 A.D.)²

I AM SEEKING TO SAY THE WORD “Islam” in a manner that expresses the *historical and human phenomenon* that is Islam in its plenitude and complexity of meaning. In conceptualizing Islam as a human and historical phenomenon, I am precisely *not* seeking to tell the reader what Islam is as a matter of Divine Command, and thus am *not* seeking to prescribe how Islam should be followed as the means to existential salvation. Rather, I seek to tell the reader what Islam has actually been as a matter of human fact in history, and thus am suggesting how Islam should be *conceptualized* as a means to a more meaningful understanding both of Islam in the human experience,

¹ L. Gardet, “Islām i. Definition and Theories of Meaning,” in E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat (editors), *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition), Volume IV, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978, 171–174, at 171.

² *ikhtilafa al-nās ba‘da nabiyyi-him fī ashyā’ kathīrah dallala ba‘du-hum ba‘dan wa barraa ba‘du-hum ‘an ba‘dīn fa-ṣārū firqaṇ mutabayyinīn wa ahzāban mutashattitīn illā anna al-islām yajma‘u-hum wa yashtamil ‘alay-him; Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ismā‘il al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn* (edited by Muḥammad Muhyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd), Beirut: al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 1995, 34.*

and thus of the human experience at large.³ If I hold out a salvific prospect, it is the altogether more modest but, perhaps, no less elusive one, of analytical clarity.

This book stems from a certain dissatisfaction with the prevailing conceptualizations of “Islam” as object, and of “Islam” as category, which, in my view, critically impair our ability to recognize central and crucial aspects of the historical reality of the very object-phenomenon “Islam” that our conceptualizations seek to denote, but fall short of so doing.⁴ By “conceptualization,” I mean a general idea by which the “object” Islam may be identified and classified, such that the connection to “Islam” of all those things purportedly encompassed by, consequent upon or otherwise related to the concept—what is to be expressed by the word “Islamic”—may coherently be known, characterized and valorized. Any act of conceptualizing any object is necessarily an attempt to identify a general theory or rule to which all phenomena affiliated with that object somehow cohere as a category for meaningful analysis—whether we locate that general rule in idea, practice, substance, relation, or process. A meaningful conceptualization of “Islam” as *theoretical object* and *analytical category* must come to terms with—and, indeed, be *coherent* with—the capaciousness, complexity, and, often, *outright contradiction* that obtains within the historical phenomenon that has proceeded from the human engagement with the idea and reality of Divine Communication to Muḥammad, the Messenger of God. It is precisely this correspondence and coherence between *Islam as theoretical object or analytical category* and *Islam as real historical phenomenon* that is considerably and crucially lacking in the prevalent conceptualizations of the term “Islam/Islamic.” It is just such a *coherent* conceptualization of Islam that I aim to put forward in this book.

The greatest challenge to a coherent conceptualization of Islam has been posed by the sheer diversity of—that is, range of differences between—those societies, persons, ideas and practices that identify themselves with “Islam.” This analytical dilemma has regularly been presented in terms of how, when conceptualizing Islam, to reconcile the relationship between “universal” and “local,” between “unity” and “diversity.” Thus, the archdeacon of Islamic studies in the post-World War II United Kingdom, W. Montgomery Watt, asked in a 1968 work entitled, like the present one, *What is Islam?*: “In what sense can Islam or any other religion be said to remain a unity . . . when one consid-

³ Straightforwardly: “The theoretical question ‘What is Islam?’ and the theological question ‘What is Islam?’ are not the same,” Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, “Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam,” *Marburg Journal of Religion* 4.2 (1999) 1–21, at 17.

⁴ Several of these conceptualizations of Islam have been conveniently collected in Andrew Rippin (editor), *Defining Islam (A Reader)*, London: Equinox, 2007.

ers the various sects and the variations in practice from region to region?”⁵ One of the most important figures in the comparative study of religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, observed: “‘Islam’ could perhaps fairly readily be understood if only it had not existed in such abundant actuality, at differing times and in differing areas, in the minds and hearts of differing persons, in the institutions and forms of differing societies, in the evolving of different stages.”⁶ In considering the scale and nature of the phenomenon of *variety* in Islam (in comparison to that of “any other religion”), it is well to bear in mind that, as the pioneer of the study of “Islamic history as world history”⁷ Marshall G. S. Hodgson pointed out, “Islam is unique among the religious traditions for the diversity of peoples that have embraced it.”⁸ It is also helpful to bear in mind that, as a leading scholar of the concept of “civilization” has noted, “among the major civilizational worlds of premodern times, Islam was no doubt the most emphatically multi-societal.”⁹ As one political scientist computed, “There are at least three hundred ethnic groups in the world today whose populations are wholly or partly Muslim.”¹⁰ It is thus not surprising that, already in 1955, in a volume entitled *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* comprising essays authored by the Orientalist luminaries of the age, Gustave E. von Grunebaum posited “The Problem: Unity in Diversity,” asking, “What does, say, a North African Muslim have in common with a Muslim from Java?”¹¹—the very question that the acclaimed anthropologist Clifford Geertz would in 1968 address in his *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*.¹² Twenty-five years later, in a study entitled *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, John Renard set out by underlining that “One must ask . . . in what sense one can apply the term

⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, *What Is Islam?* London: Longman, 1968, 152–153.

⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962, and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 145.

⁷ The phrase is that of Edmund Burke III, “Islamic History as World History: Marshall G. S. Hodgson and the *The Venture of Islam*,” published as a “Conclusion” to Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 301–328.

⁸ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, 1:75.

⁹ Johann P. Arnason, “Civilizational Patterns and Civilizing Processes,” *International Sociology* 16 (2001) 387–405, at 395.

¹⁰ Sharon Siddique, “Conceptualizing Contemporary Islam: Religion or Ideology?” *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion* 5 (1981) 203–223, at 208.

¹¹ G. E. von Grunebaum, “The Problem: Unity in Diversity,” in Gustave E. von Grunebaum (editor), *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 17–37, at 18.

¹² Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

'Islam' and its adjectival form 'Islamic' to cultures so diverse as those of Morocco and Malaysia?"¹³ while as recently as 2012, the Pew Research Forum of Religion and Public Life financed and published a massive global survey entitled *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity* that sought to determine "What beliefs and practices unite these diverse peoples into a single religious community, or ummah? And how do their religious convictions and observances vary?"¹⁴

The scholarly literature produced in sundry disciplines over the past half-century is rife with statements such as that of a representative art historian who wrote recently: "Academics and practitioners at the beginning of the twenty-first century remain at a loss to define with any clarity, let alone unity, what may be the best strategies for understanding the multiple phenomena that may be gathered under the aegis of an Islamic art and its history,"¹⁵ and that of a representative anthropologist who expressed a problem especially vexatious to his tribe: "The main challenge for the study of Islam is to describe how its universalistic or abstract principles have been realized in various social and historical contexts without representing Islam as a seamless essence on the one hand or as a plastic congeries of beliefs and practices on the other."¹⁶ As another put it, "The problem for anthropologists is to find a framework in which to analyze the relationship between this single, global entity, Islam, and the multiple entities that are the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims in specific communities at specific moments in history . . . to reconcile, analytically rather than theologically, the one universal Islam with the multiplicity of religious ideas and practices in the Muslim world."¹⁷ In sum: "Anyone working on the anthropology of Islam will be aware that there is considerable diversity in the beliefs and practices of Muslims. The first problem is therefore one of organizing this diversity in terms of an adequate concept."¹⁸

¹³ John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993, xix.

¹⁴ Pew Research Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2012, 5.

¹⁵ Kishwar Rizvi, "Art," in Jamal J. Elias (editor), *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2010, 6–25, at 7.

¹⁶ Dale F. Eickelman, "Changing Interpretations of Islamic Movements," in William R. Roff (editor), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 13–30, at 18 (reiterating his earlier statement in Dale F. Eickelman, "The Study of Islam in Local Contexts," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17 (1982) 1–16, at 1).

¹⁷ Robert Launay, *Beyond the Stream: Islam and Society in a West African Town*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 6–7 (in a chapter entitled, "The One and the Many").

¹⁸ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Contempo-

That this challenge has, unfortunately, not yet been met successfully—which is to say that the existing conceptualizations and uses of “Islam/Islamic” do *not* express a coherent object of meaning (or an object of coherent meaning)—is readily reflected in the fact that analysts, be they historians, anthropologists, sociologists, or scholars of art or religion, are often frankly unsure of what they mean when they use the terms “Islam/Islamic”—or whether, indeed, they should use the terms at all. As Ira M. Lapidus, the author of a panoramic *History of Islamic Societies*,¹⁹ once said, “We write Islamic history but we cannot easily say what it is.”²⁰ More recently, Chase F. Robinson, the author of a state-of-the-art monograph, *Islamic Historiography*,²¹ lamented: “Surely I am not the only Islamic historian who, though recoiling at the use of ‘essentializing’ definitions, practices his craft without a clear understanding why the history made by Muslims is conventionally described in religious terms (‘Islamic’) while that of non-Muslims is described in political ones (‘late Roman,’ ‘Byzantine,’ ‘Sasanian’).”²² Robinson’s solution is to issue

rary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986, 5. Without doubt, anthropologists who confront the vagaries of Muslims in the local field are particularly challenged by this question: “We must find some other way to deal with diversity in Islam . . . If we are to understand Islam as a somehow connected discursive tradition and not a myriad of discursive local traditions, we need to understand what links various local ‘islams’ together,” Lukens-Bull, “Between Text and Practice,” at 7, and 14; “Locality arguably looms larger as an issue for Muslims than for followers of any other religion . . . Muslims’ dual pull—toward practical and doctrinal universalism, toward the historical particulars of an Arabian revelation—leads to two complementary types of practice: struggles to define the universal qualities of the ‘religious,’ and efforts to develop distinct identities, local by definition, with respect to these universal qualities,” John R. Bowen, “What is ‘Universal’ and ‘Local’ in Islam?” *Ethos* 26 (1998) 258–261, at 258; “if Islam is a unitary phenomenon, how does one deal with the obvious diversity and complexity within and between Muslim societies?” Benjamin Soares, “Notes on the Anthropological Study of Islam and Muslim Societies in Africa,” *Culture and Religion* 1 (2000) 277–285, at 280. “Anthropologists have sought to assess how and to what extent it is possible to generalize about Muslim societies and cultures across space (and, to some extent, through time). What is the relationship between the one and the many—the universal and the particular, Islam and the empirical diversity of plural Islams?” Séan McLoughlin, “Islam(s) in Context: Orientalism and the Anthropology of Muslim Societies and Cultures,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 28 (2007) 273–296, at 274. See also the political scientist Sharon Siddique: “There is a contradiction, so to speak, between two ideological perspectives: one universalistic, and the other particularistic . . . Islam as a universal ideology has a certain coherence, a certain unity . . . there is also much squabbling going on within Islam . . . this unity contains a great deal of diversity,” Siddique, “Conceptualizing Contemporary Islam,” 207, 211.

¹⁹ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

²⁰ Ira M. Lapidus, “Islam and the Historical Experience of Muslim Peoples,” in Malcolm H. Kerr (editor), *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems*, Malibu: Undena Publications, 1980, 89–101, at 89.

²¹ Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

²² Chase F. Robinson, “Reconstructing Early Islam: Truth and Consequences,” in Herbert Berg (editor), *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003, 101–134, at 101–102.

the call “Let us abandon ‘Islam’ as a term of historical explanation”²³—a view, as we will see in Chapter 2 of this book, that is shared by analysts from different fields, and with which I disagree.

This lack of coherence between the term “Islam” and the putative object-phenomenon to which it refers is seen in the continuing inability of the scholarly discourse to provide answers about the relationship to “Islam” of a range of basic historical phenomena. In what follows, I will summarily lay out the nature and extent of the conceptual problem by presenting six straightforward questions (though many more could be adduced at length).



First, there is the hoary question raised repeatedly by scholars: “What is Islamic about Islamic philosophy?” In a classic study entitled, “The Islamic Philosophers’ Conception of Islam,” Michael Marmura asked: “In what sense are we using the term ‘Islamic’ when referring to them? . . . the need for clarification becomes particularly pressing.”²⁴ Some thirty years later, in his introduction to an *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, Oliver Leaman noted that “The obvious question . . . is why are the thinkers who are discussed here classified under the description of Islamic philosophy? Some of these thinkers are not Muslim, and some of them are not philosophers in a straightforward sense. What is Islamic philosophy?”²⁵ Marmura answered the question “in two senses”: “‘Islamic’ refers normally to those philosophers who professed themselves adherents of Islam, the religion,” and “in a general cultural (and chronological) sense” also for non-Muslim philosophers, “indicating that they belong to the civilization characterized as ‘Islamic.’”²⁶ A recent authoritative volume, however, answers the question by deeming it “sensible to call the tradition ‘Arabic’ and not ‘Islamic’ philosophy” (and thus calls itself *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* rather than *to Islamic Philosophy*) for which nomenclature two reasons are offered: “First, many of those involved were in fact Christians or Jews . . . second, many philosophers of the formative period . . . were interested primarily in coming to grips with the texts made available in the translation movement, rather than with putting for-

²³ Robinson, “Reconstructing Early Islam,” 134.

²⁴ Michael F. Marmura, “The Islamic Philosophers’ Conception of Islam,” in Richard G. Hovnanian and Speros Vryonis, Jr. (editors), *Islam’s Understanding of Itself*, Malibu: Undena Publications, 1983, 87–102, at 87–88.

²⁵ Oliver Leaman, “Introduction,” in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (editor), *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, Lahore: Suhaib Academy, 2002, 1–10, at 1.

²⁶ Marmura, “The Islamic Philosophers’ Conception of Islam,” 89.

ward a properly ‘Islamic’ philosophy.”²⁷ The widespread recognition of the problem is summed up in the chapter title of a recent work by Rémi Brague: “Just How Is Islamic Philosophy Islamic?”²⁸

The fulcral nature of the dilemma is readily evident in the question of whether, for example, it makes sense to call the philosopher, Ibn Sīnā/Avicenna (d. 1037)—undisputedly one of the most seminal sources of foundational and orientational ideas for the civilization and history we call Islamic²⁹—an “Islamic” philosopher, when his Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic rationalism led him to the fundamental idea that there is a superior Divine Truth that is accessible only to the particularity of superior human intellects, and a lesser version of that Truth that communicates itself *via* Prophets, such as Muhammad, and is *prescribed* by them to the commonality of lesser human intellects, and that, as a logical consequence, the text of the Qur’ān with its specific prescriptions and proscriptions is not a literal or direct expression of Divine Truth, but only what we might call a “Lowest Common Denominator” translation of that Truth into inferior figures of speech for the (limited) edification of the ignorant majority of humankind. As Ibn Sīnā said in a famous passage on the Real-Truth about God and existence:

As for Divinely-Prescribed Law [*al-sharā‘*], one general principle is to be admitted, which is that the Prescribed Law and doctrines [*al-milal*] that are brought forth upon the tongue of a Prophet are aimed at addressing

²⁷ Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, “Introduction,” in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (editors), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 1–9, at 3.

²⁸ Rémi Brague, *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, 57–70.

²⁹ The long-term historical effects on societies of Muslims of Avicennan philosophy, including the continuing foundational presence of Avicennan texts and ideas in educational curricula, are increasingly well documented in the scholarship: see, representatively, Jean R. Michot, “La Pandémie Avicennienne au XIe/XIIe siècle: Presentation, édition princeps et traduction de l’introduction du Livre de l’advenue du monde (*Kitāb ḥudūth al-‘ālam*) d’Ibn Ghaylan al-Balkhi,” *Arabica* 40 (1993) 288–344; Sonja Brentjes, “On the Location of the Ancient or ‘Rational’ Sciences in Muslim Educational Landscapes (AH 500–1100),” *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 4.1 (2002) 47–71; Robert Wisnovsky, “The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in the Post-Classical (ca. 1100–1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations,” in P. Adamson, H. Baltussen, and M. W. F. Stone (editors), *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2004, 149–191; Gerhard Endress, “Reading Avicenna in the Madrasa: Intellectual Genealogies and Chains of Transmission of Philosophy and the Sciences in the Islamic East,” in James E. Montgomery (editor), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, Leuven: Peeters, 2006, 371–422; and Robert Wisnovsky, “Avicenna’s Islamic Reception,” in Peter Adamson (editor), *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 190–213.

the masses as a whole. Now, it is obvious that the Realization-of-Truth [*al-tahqiq*] . . . cannot be communicated to the multitude . . . Upon my life, if God the Exalted did charge a Messenger that he should communicate the Real-Truths [*al-haqiq*] of these matters to the masses with their dull natures and with their perceptions tied down to pure sensibles, and then constrained him to pursue relentlessly and successfully the task of bringing faith and salvation to the multitude . . . then He has certainly laid upon him a duty incapable of fulfillment by any man! . . . Prescribed Laws [*al-sharā'i*] are intended to address the multitude in terms intelligible to them, seeking to bring home to them what transcends their intelligence by means of simile and symbol. Otherwise, Prescribed Laws would be of no use whatever . . . How can, then, the external form of Prescribed Law [*zāhir al-sharā'*] be adduced as an argument in these matters?³⁰

Ibn Sīnā (and just about all the philosophers with him) arrived hence at the “higher-truth” conclusions that the world is eternal, that God does not know the particulars of what we do and say, that there will be no bodily resurrection on a Day of Divine Judgement, that there is no Paradise or Hellfire, and that the specific prescriptions and proscriptions of Revealed law are not *intrinsically* true, but only *instrumentally* so (meaning that they are not necessarily any truer or more valid than other *forms* of truth).

These views of the nature of Divine Truth are in direct contradiction of the letter of the graphically and painfully reiterated theology and eschatology of the Qur’ān that is taken as constitutive of general Muslim creed, and were, as such, famously condemned as definitive Unbelief/Denial of Divine Truth (*kufir*) by the great “Proof of Islam” (*Hujjat al-Islām*) Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī

³⁰ *ammā amr al-shar'* *fa-yanbaghī an yu'lama fī-hi qānūn wāhid wa huwa anna al-shar'* *wa al-mīlāt al-ātiyah 'alā lisān nabi min al-anbiyā' yurām bi-hā al-jumhūr kāffatan thumma min al-mā'lūm al-wādīh anna al-tahqiq . . . mumtani' ilqā'u-hu ilā al-jumhūr . . . wa la-'amr-i law kallafa Allāh ta'ālā rasūlān min al-rusul an yulqīya haqā'iq hādhīhi al-umūr ilā al-jumhūr min al-'āmmah al-ghalīzah tibā'i-him al-muta'alliqah bi-al-maḥsūsāt al-ṣarfah awḥāmu-hum thumma sāma-hu an yakūna munjizan li-'āmmati-him al-īmān wa al-ijābah . . . la-kallafa-hu shāṭatan wa an yaf'al mā laysa fī quwwat al-bashar . . . fa-zāhir min hādhā kulli-hi anna al-sharā'i wāridah li-khitāb al-jumhūr bi-mā yafhamūnā muqarriban mā lā yafhamūna ilā afhāmi-him bi-al-tashbih wa al-tamthīl . . . wa kayfa yakūn zāhir al-shar' hujjatan fī hādhā al-bāb; Ibn Sīnā, Risālah adhāwiyyah fī amr al-mā'ād (edited by Sulaymān Dunyā), Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1949, 44–45, and 49–50; I have benefited from the translation of Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958, 42–43, but have changed his translation of *shar'* from “religion” to Prescribed Law since what Ibn Sīnā means by *shar'* is a truth apprehended, not by philosophical-rational means, but rather one that is *prescribed* by God “on the tongue of a prophet.”*

(d. 1111), in his landmark work *The Refutation of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifah*)—a denunciation which, Michael Marmura notes, “was not uttered for sheer rhetorical effect” but “was an explicit charge made in terms of Islamic law.”³¹

Are these definitive philosophical ideas Islamic or un-Islamic? Ibn Sīnā, who spoke of “the true *shari‘ah* [*al-shari‘ah al-haqqah*] which was brought to us by our Prophet, our lord, and our master, Muhammad—God’s prayer be upon him and his family,”³² himself clearly thought of the truths at which he arrived by philosophical-rational means as being *true to Islam*, and, in answer to those who thought otherwise, proclaimed of himself:

It is not so easy and trifling to call me an Unbeliever;
No faith is better founded than my faith.
I am singular in my age; and if I am an Unbeliever—
In that case, there is no single Muslim anywhere!³³

Robert Hall is thus quite correct when he says that the Muslim philosophers put forward philosophy as “the version of the Muslim faith that is best for the intellectually gifted believer.”³⁴

The relationship of philosophy to “Islam” is further complicated by the fact that Avicennan philosophy constituted—and was acknowledged by Muslims as constituting—the basis of post-Avicennan Islamic scholastic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*). At the same time that some of Avicenna’s most crucial philosophical conclusions were denounced by the practitioners of Islamic theology, the *philosophical method* that led him to these conclusions was incorporated into the standard textbooks of scholastic theology that were taught in *madrasahs* down to the twentieth century. Thus, in the thirteenth century (seventh century of Islam), the great North African intellectual, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1405), complained in his *Introduction to History* (*al-Muqaddimah*):

³¹ Marmura, “The Islamic Philosophers’ Conception of Islam,” 88–89.

³² Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, (a parallel English-Arabic text edited, annotated and translated by Michael E. Marmura), Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005, 347–348.

³³ *kufr-i chu manī gazāf o āsān na-buvad / muḥkamtar az īmān-i man īmān na-buvad / dar dahr chu man yaki o ānhām kāfir / pas dar hamah dahr yak musalmān na-buvad*; compare the translation by Syed Hasan Barani, “Ibn Sina and Alberuni: A Study in Similarities and Contrasts,” 3–14, in *Avicenna Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta: Iran Society, 1956, 3–14, at 8; the Persian text is given by Sa‘id Nafisi, “Chand nuktah-‘i tāzah dar-bārah-i Ibn-i Sīnā,” *Avicenna Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta: Iran Society, 1956, 21–45, at 45.

³⁴ Robert E. Hall, “Intellect, Soul and Body in Ibn Sīnā: Systematic Synthesis and Development of the Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic and Galenic Theories,” in Jon McGinnis (editor), *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004, 62–86, at 70.

The problems of theology have been confused with those of philosophy. This has gone so far that the one discipline is no longer distinguishable from the other.³⁵

Ibn Khaldūn's statement (and we should remember that he was a hostile witness to philosophy) confounds, several centuries in advance, what that most erudite historian of the natural sciences and philosophy in Islam, A. I. Sabra, has criticized as the "widely-held" but "downright false" "marginality thesis" put forward by modern students of Islamic philosophy, namely, the notion

that scientific and philosophical activity in medieval Islam had no significant impact on the social, economic, educational and religious institutions . . . that those who kept the Greek legacy alive in Islamic lands constituted a small group of scholars who had little to do with the spiritual life of Muslims, who made no important contribution to the main currents of Islamic intellectual life, and whose work and interests were marginal to the central concerns of Islamic society.³⁶

³⁵ *iltabasat masā'il al-kalām bi-masā'il al-falsafah bi-haythu lā yamatayyaz ahad al-fannayn 'an al-ākhar*, 'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijariyyah al-Kubrā, n.d., 466; the translation is that of Franz Rosenthal; Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (translated by Franz Rosenthal), Princeton: Bollingen, 1958, 3:53; the statement is highlighted in A. I. Sabra, "Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islamic Theology: The Evidence of the Fourteenth Century," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 9 (1994) 1–42.

³⁶ A. I. Sabra, "The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement," *History of Science* 25 (1987) 223–243, at 229. There is no shortage of "strong" examples of this thesis in the scholarly literature; but its pervasiveness is perhaps better illustrated through "soft" examples. S. Nomanul Haq, in writing about the intellectual relationship of philosophy and philosophers to the discourses of *kalām* theologians, Sufis, and legal scholars, writes that "in the formation of the normative Islamic tradition concerning the articulation of the notion of truth . . . we can disregard the *falsāfa* for they remained peripheral to a consciously cultivated Islamic religious outlook of the rest [of the Muslims]." S. Nomanul Haq, "The Taxonomy of Truth in the Islamic Religious Doctrine and Tradition," in Robert Cummings Neville (editor), *Religious Truth*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, 127–144, at 137. Peter Heath insists that the philosophers' "hermeneutic approach remained a minority opinion . . . even among the intellectual elite," Peter Heath, "Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches," *Arabica* 36 (1989) 173–210, at 194. Louis Gardet classified philosophy and Sufism as "two marginal sciences," Louis Gardet, "Religion and Culture," in P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (editors), *The Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 2B: Islamic Society and Civilization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 569–603, at 597. It is thus hardly surprising that a non-expert such as Hans Küng, whose recent hefty monograph on Islam is based on a prodigious reading of secondary scholarship and thus, rather like a good undergraduate essay, expresses a synthesis of that literature, opines the well-grounded error "in Islam philosophy remained a marginal phenomenon and so for my paradigm analysis it will be enough to make a brief survey of the development by considering promi-

The “marginality thesis” has arisen, at least in part, from a failure to distinguish between the socially rarefied and intellectually specialized nature of the technical *practice* of philosophy as an undertaking in a society, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the broader intellectual and cultural *effects* of philosophy as diffused through and taken up in the endemic discourses of those societies in which philosophy is practiced. While philosophers *do* philosophy, many other people are affected by it. To this point, however, historians of Islam have yet to carry out Sabra’s *desideratum*: “The falsity of the marginality thesis . . . can best be demonstrated by offering a description of an alternative picture—one which shows the connections with cultural factors and forces.”³⁷ In a separate monograph, Nenad Filipovic and I attempt *inter alia* to demonstrate and depict the central place of Islamic philosophy in the larger discourses, practices and consciousness of one historically significant Muslim society—that of the Ottomans.³⁸ Some sporadic forays in that direction for historical societies of Muslims at large will also be made in the present book by means of major representative examples, beginning, in a few pages, with a consideration of the central and seminal role in the history of societies of Muslims of what one scholar of Islam has called “philosophic religion.”

One important symptom that helps to dispel the notion of philosophy as a marginal foreign science in the discourses of Muslims, is the swift historical replacement in both the discipline of philosophy and in the discourses of Muslims at large of the Greek-derived term *falsafah* (philosophy) with the Qur’ānic-Arabic term *hikmah* (Persian, Ottoman, Urdu: *hikmat*): “He gives wisdom [*hikmah*] to whom He wills; and he who is given *hikmah* has been given an abundant good—but none are cognizant of this save those possessed of understanding.”³⁹ Ibn Sinā himself designated *hikmah* “a *real-true* philosophy [*falsafah bi-al-ḥaqīqah*]: a *first* philosophy which imparts validation to the principles of the rest of the sciences and that is Wisdom in Real-Truth

nent philosophical personalities who are significant for the beginning, high point and end of Arabic philosophy,” Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2004, 367.

³⁷ Sabra, “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam,” 229.

³⁸ See the chapter on “Philosophy” in the forthcoming book by Shahab Ahmed and Nenad Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire: Rethinking Islam through the Ottomans, Rethinking the Ottomans through Islam*. A recent work that argues that “Islamic intellectual life has been characterized by reason in the service of a non-rational revealed code of conduct . . . that the core intellectual tradition of Islam is deeply rational, though based on revelation,” is John Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 3–4.

³⁹ *yu’tī al-hikmata ilā man yashā’ wa man yu’tā al-hikmata faqad ūtiyā khayran kathīran wa mā yadhdhakku illā ūlū al-albāb*, Qur’ān 2:269 al-Baqarah.

[*al-hikmah bi-al-haqīqah*.]”⁴⁰ “*Hikmah* is the perfecting of the human soul by the conceptualization of things and by the verification of theoretical and practical real-truths to the extent of human capacity.”⁴¹ As such, *hikmah* is the knowing of the idea and reality of the Universal Truth of Divine Creation; that is to say, *hikmah* is the knowing of the Truth of God—as Ibn Sīnā wrote, it encompasses Divine Science (*al-ilm al-ilāhī*).⁴² The swift historical reconstitution by Muslims of *falsafah* as *hikmah* is thus indicative of the thorough-going integration of the modes of thinking and speaking constitutive of philosophy *into* the larger modes of thinking and speaking constitutive of historical societies of Muslims. Conceived by Muslims as *hikmah*/wisdom from the Divine (or *hikmah*/wisdom of the Divine), philosophy became not only textually-tied, but also semantically- and cosmologically-tied to the Revelatory Truths of the Universally-Wise God (the *al-Hakīm* of the Qur’ān), and thus became conceived of in the vocabulary of Muslims as “universal wisdom.” *Hikmah* is also semantically tied to the concept of “rule” (*hukm*; from the same trilateral Arabic root, *h-k-m*)—thus, *hikmah*/philosophy is both the identification of the *theoretical rules* or values operative in the universe, as well as the enactment and application of *practical rules* or values consonant with those theoretical rules.

The historical mobilization of the word *hikmah* as *falsafah* expresses the conceptual recognition and operationalization in societies of Muslims of the claim of philosophy to know universal truth, and thus of the value of those truths as a basis for personal and social action. Practitioners of philosophy came to be designated as *hukamā'* (singular: *hakīm*), those who have or who “do” *hikmah*. The same term was applied also to physicians, who (like philosophers) applied reason to identify universal truths practically applicable for individual and collective human well-being (Ibn Sīnā was, of course, the philosopher-physician *in excelsius*). The re-apprehension of *falsafah* as *hikmah* and its application in the life of a Muslim is expressed in the following introductory passage to the major work of the brilliant sixteenth-/seventeenth-century intellectual, Mūllā Ṣadrā of Shīrāz (d. 1635):

⁴⁰ *ha-hunā falsafah bi-al-haqīqah wa falsafah ūlā wa inna-hā tufid taṣhiḥ mabādi' sā'ir al-'ulūm wa inna-hā al-hikmah bi-al-haqīqah*; Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), *al-Shifā*, 3 (compare the translation of Marmura, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 3).

⁴¹ *al-hikmah istikmāl al-nafs al-insaniyyah bi-taṣawwur al-umūr wa al-taṣdiq bi-al-haqā'iq al-nazariyyah wa al-'ilmiyah 'alā qadr al-tāqah al-insāniyyah*; Ibn Sīnā, *'Uyūn al-hikmah* (edited by Muwaffaq Fawzī al-Jabr), Beirut: Dār al-Yanābi', 1996 (cited by Hikmet Yaman, *Prophetic Niche in the Virtuous City: The Concept of Hikmah in Early Islamic Thought*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011, 253—compare the translation).

⁴² Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), *al-Shifā*, 2.

Philosophy [*falsafah*] is the perfecting of the human soul by cognition of the Real-Truths of existents as they actually are, and by judging their Existence by attaining truth through demonstrations—not taking from conjecture or from adherence to authority—to the extent of human capacity. You could say that philosophy organizes the world in a rational order to the measure of human capacity so that one might resemble himself to the Creator.

And whereas the human emerges as a knead of two ingredients—a spiritual form (from the world) of Command, and a sensible matter (from the world) of Creation—and thereupon possesses in his soul both the aspect of attachment (to the body) and the aspect of abstraction (from it)—it is certainly the case that *hikmah* is made more capacious in measure of building up the two potentials by cultivating the two capacities towards two skills: theoretical abstraction, and practical attachment.

The goal of the theoretical art is the colouring of the soul in the image of Existence as it is ordered in its Perfection and its Completion—and its becoming a rational world resembling the Source-World-Itself . . . This art of *hikmah* is that sought and requested by the Master of the Messengers—preservation and peace be upon him and his family—in his supplication “O My Lord, show us things as they are!”⁴³

This passage highlights the philosophers’ conception of their project as directly related to Prophethood and to knowledge of God: the Prophet himself seeks from God precisely the art of *hikmah*. The philosophers conceive of a

⁴³ *inna al-falsafah istikmāl al-nafs al-insāniyyah bi-ma'rifat ḥaqā'iq al-mawjūdāt 'alā mā hiya 'alay-hā wa al-ḥukm bi-wujūdī-hā taḥqīqan bi-al-barāhīn lā akhdhan bi-al-zann wa al-taqlīd qadr al-wus' al-insāni wa in shi'ta qulta naẓama naẓman 'aqliyyan 'alā ḥasab al-ṭāqah al-bashariyyah li-yahsula al-tashabbuh bi-al-bāri' ta'ālā wa lammā jā'a al-insān ka-al-ma'jūn min khiltayn śūrah ma'nawiyah amriyyah wa māddah hissiyah khalqiyah wa kānat li-nafsihi aydan jihatā ta'alluq wa tajarrud lā jurm iftānat al-hikmah bi-hasab 'imārat al-nash'atayn bi-iṣlāh al-quwwatayn ilā fannayn naẓariyyah tajarrudiyah wa 'amaliyyah ta'alluqiyyah. ammā al-naẓariyyah fa-ghayātu-hā intiqāsh al-nafs bi-śūrat al-wujūd 'alā nizāmi-hi bi-kamāli-hi wa tamāmi-hi wa ṣayrūrati-hā 'alāman 'aqliyyan mushābihan li-al-'ālam al-'aynī . . . wa hādhā al-fann min al-hikmah huwa al-matlūb li-sayyid al-rusul al-mas'ūl fī du'a'-hi ṣallā Allāh 'alay-hi wa āli-hi wa sallama ilā rabbi-hi haythu qāla rabb-i ari-nā al-ashyā' ka-mā huwa, Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, *al-Hikmah al-muta'āliyah fī al-asfār al-'aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, Qum: al-Maktabah al-Muṣṭafavī, n.d., 1:20–21, (the Prophet's supplication is Qur'ān 26:82 al-Shu'arā'). This passage is cited in Sajjad H. Rizvi, “Philosophy as a way of life in the world of Islam: Applying Hadot to the Study of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1635),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75 (2012) 33–45, at 42 (compare the translation), where Rizvi correctly notes that “This definition makes it clear that philosophizing is more than a ratiocinative discourse but is, in fact, closely related with the practice of theosis (*taalluh*) . . . It also closely relates this practice to a prophetic inheritance and connects philosophizing to the Qur'ānic notion of wisdom.”*

prophet as a human being who possesses such extraordinarily developed capacities of reason (*'aql*), intellectual insight (*al-hads*) and imagination (*al-quwwah al-mutakhayyilah*)—faculties that are present in all persons to some less developed degree—that he is able thereby to attain direct conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with, and to apprehend in an instant and as as a whole (that is to say: *all at once*) the pure, formless, universal Truth that issues from the Active (Rational) Intellect (God) through the celestial domains.⁴⁴ In other words, a prophet is an *über*-philosopher—which, in turn, implies that all philosophers are, for all conceptual and practical purposes, engaged in the *same* project as are prophets: that of *hikmah*, or seeking to know universal truth-as-it-Really-is through the perfection of pure reason (on these terms, one might almost say, upon beholding a great philosopher: “There, but for grace of God, goes a prophet!”).

The historical centrality and foundationality to the history of Muslims of the philosophers’ rational striving to know truth-as-it-Really-is can most economically be illustrated by way of the philosophers’ definition of God. Ibn Sinā conceptualized God as the sole Necessary Existents (*wājib al-wujūd*) upon Which all other existents are necessarily contingent. It is this philosophers’ conceptualization of God that became *the* operative concept of the Divinity taught in *madrasahs* to students of theology *via* the standard introductory textbook on logic, physics, and metaphysics which was taught to students in *madrasahs* in cities and towns throughout the vast region from the Balkans to Bengal in the rough period 1350–1850, and which was tellingly entitled *Hidāyat al-hikmah*, or *Guide to Hikmah*.⁴⁵ In the discourse of *madrasah* theolog-

⁴⁴ Also, and crucially, the Prophet is able, by means of his imaginative faculty, to communicate knowledge of this prophetic revelation (*waḥy*) to us less intellectually and imaginatively developed souls in a form productive our salvific benefit. Further to Rahman’s superb *Prophecy in Islam*, an accessible presentation is now that of Frank Griffel, “The Muslim Philosophers’ (*falāsiṭa*) Rationalist Explanation of Muḥammad’s Prophecy and Its Influence on Islamic Theology and Sufism,” in Jonathan E. Brockopp (editor), *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 158–179.

⁴⁵ The author is Athir al-Din al-Abhari (d. 1265); on the author and the work see Syed Ali Tawfiq Al-Attas, *The mashshā'i Philosophical System: A Commentary and Analysis of the Hidāyat al-Hikmah of Athir al-Dīn al-Mufaddal ibn ‘Umar al-Abharī al-Samarqandī*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 2010 (the presentation of God conceived of as “Necessary Existents” appears in translation at 165–173). The importance of the work may be gauged not only by the fact that no less than twenty commentaries and super-commentaries on the work had been authored by the early seventeenth century (see Kātib Çelebi Hājjī Khalifah, *Kashf al-żunūn ‘an asāmi al-kutub wa al-funūn*, (edited by Şerefettin Yalatkaya and Kılıslı Rifat Bilge), Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1941–1943, 2028–2029), but in that not less than eight hundred manuscript copies—a truly staggering number—of the *Hidāyat al-hikmah* and its commentaries and super-commentaries are extant today in the manuscript libraries of Turkey (see Abdullah Yormaz, “Muhalif bir metin nasıl okunur? Osmanlı medreselerinde *Hidāyetü'l-Hikme*,” *Divan İlmî Arar-*

ogy, God is conceptually posited as and routinely referred to as “The Necessary Existent” (perhaps, as the ultimate symptom of the “confusion” of the sciences of theology and philosophy of which Ibn Khaldūn spoke). In other words, mainstream Islamic theology (Sunnī and Shī‘ī) in the millennium-long age of the *madrasah* conceptualized God on a philosophical foundation whose logic and epistemology had led its acknowledged progenitor, the philosopher, Ibn Sina—whom we can legitimately call “the man who effectively defined God for Muslims”—to conclusions that were condemned as exemplary Unbelief. How is this Islamic?



The second question: when Sufis make their culminating assertion that virtuoso “friends of God” (*awliyā’ Allāh*; singular: *walī*) who are at experiential one-ness with the Real-Truth, *al-ḥaqīqah*, are no longer bound by the specific forms and strictures of Islamic law and ritual practice, *al-shari‘ah*, that confine less spiritually and existentially developed souls, is this an Islamic or an un-Islamic truth-claim?

We have just noted the philosophers’ concept of prophethood as an extraordinary kind of knowledge resulting from the presence within a given individual of an extraordinary degree of development of a human capacity—reason—otherwise inherent in every ordinary person. This is paralleled by the definitive Sufi idea: by rigorous developmental exercise of the *holistic* faculties of knowing common to all humans (as opposed to giving priority to the ratiocinative faculty alone), any individual can, potentially, develop his or her capacity to attain immediate personal revelatory experience (*kashf*) of some measure of the Higher truths of the Divine (even if that person does not attain the ultimate revelatory capacity of a prophet, who is, for the Sufis, effectively an *über*-Sufi—one might almost say, upon beholding a *walī*: “There, but for grace of God, goes a prophet!”). What we witness in the socially-prolific ritual

şırmaları 18 (2005) 175–192, at 186. Its continuing importance in the curriculum of *madrasahs* from the Balkans-to-Bengal may be gauged by a sample of nineteenth- and early-twentieth century print editions from Istanbul, Tehran and Lucknow: Athir al-Dīn al-Abharī (with commentary by Qādī Mir Ḥusayn al-Maybūdī, supercommentary by Muṣlīḥ al-Dīn al-Lārī and super-supercommentary by Qarah-Khalil), *al-Lārī ‘alā Qādī Mir ‘alā al-Hidāyah min al-hikmah ma‘a al-hāshiyah li-Qarah Khalil*, Istanbul: Dār al-Ṭibā‘ah al-‘Amirah, 1271 h [1855]; Athir al-Dīn al-Abharī (with commentary by Qādī Mir Ḥusayn al-Maybūdī and supercommentary by Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī), *Sharḥ al-Hidāyah al-Athiriyyah ma‘a ḥawāshi*, Tehran: al-Shaykh Ahmad al-Shirāzī, 1331 h [1913]; and Athir al-Dīn al-Abharī (with commentary by Ṣadr al-Dīn Mulla Ṣadrā Shirāzī, and supercommentary by Wali al-Dīn al-Faranjī), *Hāshiyat al-Sadrā*, (edited by Muḥammad Ihsān Allāh al-Lakhnawī, Lucknow: Naval Kishōr, 1303 h [1885].

practices of Sufi *dhikr*—the rigorous developmental exercises for the development of physical, spiritual, and psychological human capacities for experiential knowing of God enacted down the centuries in cities and towns and villages across the Islamic world—is the performance of Sufis striving for the holistic perfection of *being* as the means to attain and access truth in the way of prophets.

Now, as every student of Islam knows, Sufism—the theory and practice of holistic, experiential knowing of Divine Truth—was, for over a millennium, a foundational, commonplace and institutionalized conceptual and social phenomenon in societies of Muslims. The omnipresence of Sufism is manifest in the proliferation over the centuries of the numerous Sufi “orders” or “brotherhoods” (*tariqah*: literally, “path” or “way,” plural: *turuq*) with whose metaphysical ideas and activities the absolute majority of the population were affiliated either by formal, individual oath of pledge (*bay’ah*), or by attendance of rituals. The physical presence of Sufism was ubiquitously manifest in the brick and mortar of the built environment of every city in the form of the various centers of Sufi activity (*khānqāh*, *zāwiyah*, *tekkeh*, *merkez*, etc.), as well as in the *barakah* (spiritual-power)-charged saint-tombs that were loci of veneration, visitation (*mazār*, *dargāh*, *ziyāratgāh*, etc.) and of intercession with the Divine (*tawassul*, *istighāthah*).

The near-universal pre-modern practice of the visitation (*ziyārah*) of Sufi tomb-shrines to benefit from the blessing of the spiritual power of the deceased saint is expressive of the recognition on the part of its practitioners of an Unseen cosmos of Revealed Truth in which Sufi practitioners were active participants and of which they were active conveyors. God Himself tells us that He is “the Originator of the Heavens and Earth, who has knowledge of the Seen and the Unseen,”⁴⁶— and the higher Real-Truth/*haqīqah* to which the Sufis aspire is the uncorrupted pure Truth of the Unseen non-material Reality to which material reality and its truths stand in a figural or metaphorical relation. In Sufi thought, the Unseen Real World and Real-Truth is *haqīqah*; this world and its truth is a *figural* or *metaphorical representation* (Arabic: *majāz*) of Real-Truth. The Visible, Witnessed material world in which we live, the Qur’ānic “World of Witnessing” (*‘ālam al-shahādah*) is the *‘ālam al-majāz*, the “World of the Figure/Metaphor,” whereas the invisible, non-material world, the Qur’ānic “World of the Unseen” (*‘ālam al-ghayb*) whence the Muhammadan Revelation issues forth and proceeds to the Seen is the *‘ālam al-haqīqah*, the “World of Real-Truth.”

It was Sufism that came to provide the conceptual and praxial vocabulary in which the majority of Muslims experienced, by way of regular collective

⁴⁶ *fātir al-samawāt wa al-ard ‘alim al-ghayb wa al-shahādah*; Qur’ān 39:46 al-Zumar.

rituals carried out in institutionalized Sufi spaces—where “higher Sufi thought tied sources of immediate relief and hope in every village and *qasbah* to Muhammad’s revelation”⁴⁷—a most profound personal Real-Truth of their existence. Sufism provided the conceptual vocabulary not only for the experiential knowing of Real-Truth, but also for its expressive articulation. Thus, as a practical matter of Sufi instruction, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jili (1366–1424), the elaborator from Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240), possibly the most influential Sufi in history, of the transfiguring Sufi concept of the “Perfect Human” (*al-insān al-kāmil*), “asserted that Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas can save the novice the difficulty of classifying and formulating the elusive mystical experiences and symbolic visions that he encounters on the Sufi Path . . . because they give him a greater conceptual clarity.”⁴⁸ The conceptual vocabulary of Sufism became an ingrained part of the idiom of the speech of Muslims, and especially of *poetry*—which was, quite simply, the most important and valued form of social communication among Muslims in the major languages of their historical self-expression, including Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu.

The manifesto of the Sufi search for Truth is summed up by probably the most widely-read Sufi poet in history, known to countless Muslims as *Mawlānā Khudāvandigār* (Our Sovereign Master), and to historians as Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), in one of the most prolifically copied, recited, and performed poetical (or other) texts in Islamic history, the *Masnavī-yi ma‘navī* (Doublets of Meaning):

The Law [*shari‘at*] is like a candle that shows the way: Without the candle in hand, there is no setting forth on the road. And when you are on the road: that journey is the Way [*tarīqat*]; and when you have reached the destination, that is the Real-Truth [*haqīqat*]. It is in this regard that they say “If the Real-Truths are manifest, the laws are nullified [*law zaharat al-ḥaqā’iq batalat al-shara‘i*],” as when copper becomes gold, or was gold originally, it does not need the alchemy that is the Law . . .

The Law [*shari‘at*] is like learning the theory of alchemy from a teacher or a book, and the (Sufi) Path [*tarīqah*] is (like) the transmutation of the copper into gold. Those who know alchemy rejoice in their knowledge of it, saying, “We know the theory of this (science)”; and those who practice it rejoice in their practice of it, saying, “We perform such works”; and those who have experienced the Real-Truth [*haqīqah*] rejoice in the

⁴⁷ Francis Robinson, “Perso-Islamic Culture in India from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Century,” in Robert L Canfield (editor), *Turco-Persia in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 104–131, at 127.

⁴⁸ Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 250.

Real-Truth, saying, “We have become gold and are delivered from the theory and practice of alchemy: we are God’s freedmen.” *Each party is rejoicing in what they have.*⁴⁹ Or the Law may be compared to learning the science of medicine, and the Path to regulating one’s diet in accordance with (the science of) medicine and taking remedies, and the Real-Truth to gaining health everlasting and becoming independent of them both.⁵⁰

The frankly-stated ultimate goal of the Sufi is to rise through the hierarchy of truth to the Real-Truth of God—in the process becoming freed from the prescriptions and proscriptions of the law which, upon arrival at the Real-Truth, are nullified. As Abū Sahl al-Tustarī (818–896), one of the first to author a recognizably Sufi commentary on the Qur’ān, once said: “The gnostics have a secret which, if manifested by God, would set the law at naught.”⁵¹

The Sufi claim to knowledge of a *different register of Divine Truth* is well-expressed by the famous Sufi, Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209), in the preamble to his exegetical commentary on the Qur’ān:

God gave the exterior reins of the Qur’ān into the hands of the people of the Exteriority from among the scholars and philosophers, so that they legislate in its (exterior) rulings and limitations and forms and laws

⁴⁹ Qur’ān 23:53 al-Mu’mīnūn.

⁵⁰ *shari’at ham chu sham’ ast rah minumāyad va bī-ān-kih shama’ bi-dast āvarī rāh raftah nashavād va chwun dar rah āmadī ān raftan-i tū tariqat ast va chwun rasīdī bi-maqṣūd ān haqīqat-ast va jihat-i īn guftih ānd kih law zaharat al-haqā’iq batālat al-sharā’i’ hamchunān-kih mis zar shavad va yā khwud az aşl zar buvad ū-rā nah ‘ilm-i kīmiyā hajat ast kih ān shari’at ast . . . shari’at hamchun ‘ilm-i kīmiyā āmūkhtanast az ustād yā az kitāb va tariqat isti’māl kardan-i dārū-hā va mis rā dar kīmiyā mālidan ast va haqīqat zar shudan-i mis kīmiyādānān bi-‘ilm-i kīmiyā shādand kih mā ‘ilm-i īn midānīm va ‘amal-kunandagān bi-‘amal-i kīmiyā shādand kih mā chunīn kārhā mikunīm va haqīqat-yāftagān bi-haqīqat shādand kih mā zar shudīm va az ‘ilm o ‘amal-i kīmiyā āzād shudīm o ‘utaqā’-Allah īm kullu hīzibin bi-mā laday-him farīhūna yā miṣāl-i shari’at hamchu ‘ilm-i tibb āmūkhtanast va tariqat parhīz kardan bi-mūjib-i tibb va dārū-hā khwurdan va haqīqat sihhat-yāftan-i abādī, Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī, *Masnavī-yi Ma’navī*, published as *The Mathnawī of Jalālu’ddīn Rūmī* (edited and translated by Reynold A. Nicholson), Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1925–1940, 5:1–2 (I have slightly emended the translation of Nicholson, *The Mathnawī of Jalālu’ddīn Rūmī*, 5:3).*

⁵¹ *li-al-‘ulama’ sīr law ażħara-hu Allāh la-baṭalat al-ahkām*, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu’āmalat al-maḥbūb wa wasf ḥaqq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥid*, Cairo: al-Maṭba’ah al-Maymaniyyah, 1899, 2:90. A discussion of variations of this text in its citations down the centuries is given in Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfi Sahl al-Tustarī*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980, 196–197. It is translated and cited by Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, 142, from Louis Massignon, *Receuil de textes inédits concernants l’histoire de la mystique en pays d’Islam*, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929, 41.

[*sharā'i*]. And He made the Unseen [*ghaybah*] of the Secrets [*asrār*] of His Discourse and the concealed subtleties of His Signs for His elect few, and made Himself manifest from His words to their hearts, spirits, intellects and secretmost-selves [*asrāri-him*], by means of revelation [*kashf*], direct vision [*'ayān*] and clarification [*bayān*], and He taught them the sciences of His Real-Truths, and the rarenesses of His subtleties, and He purified the rungs of their intellects by revelations of the lights of His Beauty, and sanctified their faculties of comprehension for the brilliance of his Majesty, and He made these the repositories for the trusts of the concealed signs of His discourse and for the complex secrets which He has reposed in his Book, and for the subtle allusions in the ambiguities and difficulties of the Verses. And He Himself taught them the meanings of that which He hid in the Qur'ān so that they come to know by His making it known to them. And He lined their eyes with the light of closeness to Him and attainment to Him, and made them privy to the unseeabilities of the virgin-brides of ruling [*hukm*] and of knowledges and revelations, and of the meanings of the understanding of the understanding, and of the secret of the secret, the Exteriory of which in the Qur'ān is Ruling [*hukm*], but within the Interiority of which is allusion and revelation which God-the-Truth set aside for the pure-for-Him and for His greatest friends, and for his far-come lovers from among the truth-full and those-drawn-near. And He veiled these secrets and marvels from others: the scholars of exteriority and the people of form, those whose ample portion is the abrogator and the abrogated, jurisprudence and science and knowledge of the permitted and the prohibited, of the statutory punishments and the rulings.⁵²

⁵² *a'ṭā azimmat al-zāhirah ilā yad ahl al-zāhir min al-'ulamā' wa al-hukamā' hattā shara'ū fī ahkāmi-hā wa ḥudūdi-hā wa rusūmi-hā wa sharā'i-hā wa ja'ala li-khāliṣat ahl ṣafwati-hi ghaybat asrār khitābi-hi wa laṭā'iḥ maknūn āyāti-hi wa tajallin min kalāmi-hi bi-na't al-kashf wa al-'ayān wa al-bayān li-qulūbi-him wa arwāḥi-him wa 'uqūli-him wa asrāri-him wa a'lama-hum 'ulūm haqā'iqi-hi wa nawādir daqā'iqi-hi wa ṣaffā durūj 'uqūli-him bi-kashf anwār jamāli-hi wa qaddasa fuhūma-hum li-sanā' jalāli-hi wa ja'ala-hā mawādī' wadai' khafīyy rumūz khitābi-hi wa mā awda'a kitāba-hu min ghawāmid asrāri-hi wa laṭif ishārāti-hi min 'ulūm al-mutashābihāt wa mushkilāt al-āyāt wa 'arrafa-hum ma'ānī mā akhfā-hu fī al-qur'ān bi-nafsi-hi hattā 'arifū bi-ta'rīfi-hi iyyā-hum wa kahħala-hum bi-nār qurbī-hi wa wiśāli-hi wa iṭṭalā'a-hum'alā ghaybiyyāt 'arā'iṣ al-ḥukm wa al-ma'ārif wa al-kawāshif wa ma'āni fahm al-fahm wa sīr al-sīr alladhī zāhiru-hu fī al-qur'ān ḥukm wa fī bātīni-hi ishārah wa kashf alladhī istathara-hu al-ḥaqqa li-asfiyā'i-hi wa akābir awliyā'i-hi wa għurabā'i ahibbā'i-hi min al-siddiqin wa al-muqarrabin wa satara hādhhi al-asrār wa al-'aqā'id 'alā ghayri-him min 'ulamā' al-zāhir wa ahl al-rusūm al-ladhīna hum fī haqq wafir min al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh wa al-fiqh wa al-ilm wa ma'rīfat al-ḥalāl wa al-harām wa al-ḥudūd wa al-ahkām; Abū Mūhammad Rūzbihān b. Abī al-Naṣr al-Baqlī al-Shirāzī, 'Arā'iṣ al-bayān fī haqā'iq al-qur'ān, Lucknow: Naval Kishōr, n.d., 2–3 (I am reading *wa ja'ala li-khāliṣat ahl ṣafwati-hi* for *wa ja'ala khāliṣat ahl ṣafwati-hi*; it might also be *wa ja'ala li-**

The idea that God's Truth is a *differentiated truth of many layers*—differentiated, that is according to the capacity of the hierarchy of layers of individuals in society to *know* it—is forcefully in evidence in the above passage as a fundamental principle of Sufi hermeneutic (and itself draws upon Qur'anic statements such as “We raise in degrees whomsoever we will, and above every possessor of knowledge is one who knows,”⁵³ and “We raise some of them above others, in degrees”).⁵⁴ The highest and deepest truths are those which Sufis access from the Unseen by direct experience of divine communication, while the lower truths are the truths of the law, of “the abrogator and the abrogated, jurisprudence and science and knowledge of the permitted and the prohibited, of the statutory punishments and the rulings” which are deduced by jurists from the surface of the Divine Text and occupy the bottom rung of the hierarchy of knowing.

There are, in other words, connected but differentiated levels of T/truth—the fact of which implies that there are connected but differentiated epistemologies for the determination of T/truth.⁵⁵ These epistemologies have human protagonists who both assert the truth-making authority of their respective epistemologies in society and are also conditioned by the social authority of those very epistemologies. In this way epistemologies are not merely theoretical notions but are also social actors. That these distinct trajectories of truth posed not merely an intellectual but a *social* challenge of truth-making is well expressed in the above passage by Rūmī where this social fact is summed up with the Qur'anic quotation *Each party is rejoicing in what they have*: that is, each party advocates its own means to Truth, its own hermeneutic and epistemology.

A prominent and permanent thread of the history of Muslims has been the struggle to arrive at a coherent working relationship in society between the respective truth-claims of law and of Sufism—a challenge to negotiate a sort of *Balance of Truth* (to adopt the title that the brilliant and urbane Ottoman bibliophile, social commentator, and cultural critic, Hājjī Khalifah Kātib Çelebī, gave to the book that he completed shortly before his death in 1657),⁵⁶ a

khāṣṣat ahl ṣafwati-hi). (Compare the partial translation of Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, at 10–11).

⁵³ *narfā'u darajātīn man nashā'u wa fawqa kulli dhī 'ilmin 'alim*, Qur'ān 12:76 Yūsuf.

⁵⁴ *wa rafā'nā ba'da-hum fawqa ba'din darajātīn*; Qur'ān 43:32 Zukhruf.

⁵⁵ See on this Vincent J. Cornell, “Faqih versus Faqir in Marinid Morocco: Epistemological Dimensions of a Polemic,” in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (editors), *Sufism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999, 208–224.

⁵⁶ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth* (translated by G. L. Lewis), London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957; the Ottoman original was first printed as Kātib Çelebi, *Mizān-ül-haqq fi iḥtiyār-il-eħaqq*, Istanbul: Kitābħāneh-yi Ebü-ż-Ziyā, 1306 h [1889].

balance, at different times and places in history, and in different social and discursive spaces in society, often weighted more to one side than to the other. Thus, Manṣūr al-Hallāj was judicially executed in Baghdad in 922 on the basis of his (not at all unique) proclamation, “I am the Truth”—but has been remembered and celebrated by Muslims down to this day, not in his legal capacity as a heretic, but in his Sufi capacity as a knower and martyr of Truth.⁵⁷ In sum, then, the Sufi lays claim to an *epistemological and hermeneutic authority that is superior to that of the jurists* of whom Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī once said: “The jurists [*al-fuqahā’*] in every age have been, and still are, in relation to those who have realized Truth [*al-muhaqqiqūn*] at the station of pharaohs in relation to prophets.”⁵⁸

Already, nearly a century before Rūmī and Ibn ‘Arabī, and in another milieu, the Baghdādī Ḥanbālī preacher, Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201)—who, as a professional matter, *competed* in the marketplace of ideas for the “hearts and minds” of the citizens of the greatest city in the Islamic world—invoked his learned forbear, the master-jurist Ibn ‘Aqil, in excoriation of his rivals; namely, those Sufis who claimed that the higher Real-Truth (*al-ḥaqīqah*) and the Revealed Law (*al-shari‘ah*) were *not* the same: “The Sufis turned the law into a name!”⁵⁹ Perhaps nowhere is this paradox expressed more pithily (and in a more revealing tone of familiarity) than in the tart exchange between

⁵⁷ Hallāj’s immortal utterance is a phrase from a line of his poetry: “I am the Truth, and the Truth, for the Truth, is Truth / Clothed in its Essence, so there is no Separation [*anā al-ḥaqqu wa al-ḥaqqu li-al-ḥaqqi haqqu / läbisun dhāta-hu fa-mā thamma farqu*]” (see the Arabic text and compare the translation in Martin Lings, *Sufi Poems: A Medieval Anthology*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2004, 28–29). For various other examples of the expression of this idea, including Ibn ‘Arabī’s poem beginning, “I am not I, and I am not H/he; For whoever I am and whoever H/he is are identical [*lastu anā wa lastu huwa / fa-man anā wa man huwa huwa*],” see Franz Rosenthal, “I am You”—Individual Piety and Society in Islam,” in Amin Banani and Speros Vryonis Jr. (editors), *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977, 33–60, at 52 (for the original, see Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah*, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah al-Kubrā, 1911, 1:496).

⁵⁸ *wa mā zālat al-fuqahā’ fi kulli zamānin ma‘a al-muhaqqiqīn bi-manzilat al-farā‘inah ma‘a al-nabīyyīn*, Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Rūh al-qudus fi muḥasabat al-nafs* (edited by ‘Ali b. Alḥmad Sāsī), Tunis: Dār al-‘Arabiyyah li-al-Kitāb, 2004, 181 (compare the translation by Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without A Shore: Ibn ‘Arabi, The Book and the Law*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, 21). A leading scholar of Ibn ‘Arabī has noted soberly that “the common concern underlying Ibn ‘Arabī’s many particular criticisms of the categories and methods of *fiqh*, when they are confused with the revealed “Path” of the *Shari‘a*, is the way that the legal preoccupations expressed in those guiding assumptions—which may in fact be necessary and inherent parts of any system of *laws* as such—inevitably tend to obscure the primary spiritual intentions of the original revelation,” James W. Morris, “Ibn ‘Arabī’s ‘Esotericism’: The Problem of Spiritual Authority,” *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990) 37–64, at 52.

⁵⁹ *ja‘alat al-sūfiyyatu al-shari‘ata isman*; Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs* (edited by Muhammad Munīr al-Dimashqī), Cairo: Idārat al-Tibā‘ah al-Munīriyyah, 1368h, 325 (cited also in Walther Braune, “Historical Consciousness in Islam,” in

God and the celebrated Sufi, Abū Yazid al-Bistāmī, reported by Ibn ‘Arabī in his magisterium, *The Meccan Revelations (al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah)*:

Abū Yazid said to God-the-Truth, “If people knew about You as I know, they would not worship You!” God-the-Truth-Most-High retorted, “Oh! Abū Yazid. If they knew about you as I know, they would pelt you with stones!”⁶⁰

(How) is this Islamic?



The third question proceeds from the first two. Two of the most *socially-pervasive* and consequential thought-paradigms in the history of societies of Muslims are the Philosophy of Illumination (*hikmat al-ishrāq*) of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardi (d. 1191) and the Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) of the “Akbar-ian” school of the most influential Sufi in history, the *Shaykh-i Akbar* (Greatest Shaykh), Muhyi al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (born in Andalucia in 1165, died in Syria in 1240). Both are cross-inflections of (Avicennan) philosophy and of Sufism; both are grounded in a hierarchical vision of the cosmos and *thus* in a hierarchical vision of humankind; both blur, in their respective emanationist iterations of the relationship between the Divinity and the material world, the boundary between Divine transcendence and Divine immanence, and thereby flirt incorrigibly with pantheism and relativism. Are these Islamic ideas?⁶¹

G. E. von Grunebaum (editor), *Theology and Law in Islam*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971, 37–51, at 47–48, footnote 6.

⁶⁰ qāla Abū Yazid li-al-haqq law ‘alima al-nās min-ka mā a’lamu mā ‘abadū-ka wa qālā la-hu al-haqq ta’ālā yā Abā Yazid law ‘alima al-nās min-ka mā a’lamu la-rajamū-ka, Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah*, 4:48; compare the translation by S.A.Q. Husaini, *The Pantheistic Monism of Ibn al-‘Arabi*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1945, 238. Abū Yazid is famous for his utterance, “Glory to me! How great is my majesty!” as well as the impossible “I, I am not I, I, because I am I-am-He, I am He-I-am-He-is-He [anā lā anā anā anā li-an-nī anā huwa anā huwa anā huwa huwa],” putative al-Salhajī, *al-Nūr min kalimāt Abī Zayd Tayfūr*, in ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī (editor), *Shaṭḥāt al-Ṣufiyāh. al-Juz’ al-awwal. Abū Yazid al-Bistāmī*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1949, 37–148, at 111 (compare the translation by Arthur J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956, 98). Abū Yazid al-Bistāmī has apparently left us a detailed narrative conversation of his experience of uniting with God: see al-Salhajī, *al-Nūr min kalimāt Abī Zayd Tayfūr*, 138–141 (translated by Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, 98–103).

⁶¹ A sense of the pervasiveness of both of these thought-paradigms in sixteenth/seventeenth century South Asia, as well as of the nature of the counter-currents thereto, is the erudite and insufficiently appreciated study by Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Islam*, 98–103.

The basic concept of Suhrawardian Illuminationist philosophy is that all being is the emanation of light from the Divine Light; with the result that there is no real distinction in the essence of all beings, only in their degree of illumination with Divine Light—effectively, then, God is (in) all things to a lesser or greater degree.⁶² The fundamental idea of Akbarian philosophy is that all things are the manifestations (*tajallīyāt*) by emanation of the Existence of God—a typical Ibn ‘Arabī statement is “Whenever I said, ‘Creation,’ its Creator said, ‘There is nothing there except Me . . . Creation is Real-Truth, and the Essence-Archetype of Creation is its Creator.’”⁶³ This makes it a very subtle operation to try to extricate God from all existing things, and has also the effect of rendering all things *true* in the degree that they are manifestations of God.⁶⁴ The potential pantheism and relativism of these concepts are encapsulated in the notorious passage from Ibn ‘Arabī’s celebrated *summa*, the *Fuṣūṣ al-hikam* (*Ringstones of Wisdom*) in which the “Greatest Shaykh” addresses the refusal of the people of the Prophet Nūḥ (Noah) to abandon their idols, as mentioned in Qur’ān 71:23 Nūḥ:⁶⁵

Northern India in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Agra: Agra University Press, 1965. For the importance of Akbarian Sufism in the Ottoman context, see the brilliant monograph by Derin Terzioğlu, “Sufi and Dissident in the Ottoman Empire: Niyāzī-yi Misrī (1618–1694),” PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1999. There is still, to my knowledge, no focused study of the influence of Suhrawardi among the Ottomans, but a sense of it may be obtained from the number of copies of his works preserved in Ottoman libraries: see H. Ritter, “Die vier Suhrawardi. Ihre Werke in Stambuler Handschriften,” *Der Islam* 24 (1937) 270–286; as well from the translation, commentarization and circulation of his work in Ottoman Turkish: see Bilal Küspinar, *Ismā‘il Ankaravī on the Illuminative Philosophy: His İzāḥū'l-Ḥikem: Its Edition and Analysis in Comparison with Dawwānī's Shawākīl al-Ḥūr*, together with the Translation of Suhrawardi's Hayākīl al-Nūr, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1996.

⁶² This is summed up by Fazlur Rahman: “Thus does al-Suhrawardi, by taking the principles of the earlier Muslim philosophers, by refuting their cardinal distinctions between essence and existence and between possibility and necessity, and further by overthrowing their theory of knowledge by a simple substitution of Light, erect a pantheism of self-luminous, self-reflecting, self-present existence, varying in degree of intensity,” Fazlur Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi*, Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1968, 18.

⁶³ *wa kullu-mā qulty khalq qāla khāliqu-hu mā thamma illā anā . . . al-khalq haqqun wa ‘ayn al-khalq khāliqu-hu*, cited in S. H. Nadeem, *A Critical Appreciation of Arabic Mystical Poetry*, Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1979, 158.

⁶⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu has put it most directly of Ibn ‘Arabi: “‘Self-manifestation’ (*tajallī*) . . . is the very basis of his world view . . . His entire philosophy is, in short, a theory of *tajallī*,” Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, 152.

⁶⁵ “They said, ‘Do not abandon your gods; do not abandon Wadd, nor Suwā‘ nor Yaghūth and Ya‘ūq and Nasrā,’ qālū lā tadharunna ālīhata-kum wa lā tadharunna Waddan wa lā Suwā‘an wa lā Yaghūtha wa Ya‘ūqa wa Nasrā.

If they had rejected those (gods/idols), they would have been ignorant of God-the-Truth [*al-haqq*] in the measure that they rejected them, for in every object of worship there is an aspect of God-the-Truth, which one who knows Him knows, and one who does not know Him does not know. In regard to the Muhammadans, there came (the verse of the Qur’ān), “Your Lord *determined* that you will not worship other than He,”⁶⁶ meaning: “He *established*.” The one who possesses knowledge knows who is worshipped and which form He manifests so as to be worshipped . . . So nothing other than God [*Allāh*] is worshipped in every object of worship.⁶⁷

Ibn ‘Arabī is here taking the Qur’ānic verse “Your Lord has determined that you will not worship other than He” to mean *not* that God has *commanded* that nothing be worshipped other than Him (the intuitive reading and common Muslim creed), but rather that God has *established as an accomplished fact* that *any* act of worship is *necessarily* directed to Him alone, and thus “in every aspect of worship” *including idolatry* (the very practice to the eradication of which the Prophet Muhammad had devoted himself) “there is an aspect of God.”

By this profoundly counter-intuitive and destabilizing reading of the Text of Revelation (summed up in the well-known Persian slogan *hamah īst*, “All is He”), Ibn ‘Arabī is able to take an indulgent view of the Qur’ānic presentation of the Prophet Hārūn/Aaron’s bootless attempt to prevent the Banū Isrā’īl/Children of Israel from worshipping the Golden Calf (for which his elder brother, Mūsā/Moses, had soundly berated him):

The incapacity of Hārūn to restrain the followers of the Calf . . . was a wisdom from God made manifest in existence: that He be worshipped in every form.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Qur’ān 17:23 al-Kahf.

⁶⁷ *fa-inna-hum idhā tarakū-hum jahalū min al-haqq ‘alā qadr mā tarakū min hā’ulā’i fa-inna li-al-haqq fi kull ma’būd wajhan ya’rifū-hu man ‘arifa-hu wa yajhalu-hu man jahala-hu. fi al-Muhammadiyin wa qadā rabbu-ka an lā ta’budū illā iyyā-hu ay hakama fa-al-‘ālim ya’lam man ‘ubida wa fi ayy sūrah zahara hattā ‘ubida . . . fa-mā ‘ubida illā Allāh fi kull ma’būd; Muhyi al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-hikam* (edited with commentary by Abū al-‘Alā’ ‘Afifi), Cairo: Ḫāṣidah, 1946, 72 (the text in bold is Qur’ān 17:23 al-Kahf). Compare the translation of this passage by R.W.J. Austin in *Ibn Al‘Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom* (translation and introduction by R.W.J. Austin), Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980, 78; and the translation by Caner K. Dagli in Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-hikam*) (translation, introduction and glosses by Caner K. Dagli), Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2004, 45–46.*

⁶⁸ *fa-kāna ‘adam quwwat irdā’ Hārūn bi-al-fīl an yunaffidha fi aṣḥāb al-‘ijl . . . ḥikmatan min*

Another notorious instance of Ibn ‘Arabī’s counter-intuitive reading is his treatment of Heaven and Hell: “Though Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of Hell and Heaven with utmost interest and in accordance with the sensual explication of traditional eschatology, he finds a number of occasions to introduce a spiritual explanation for them. The basis for this is that *‘udhāb* (punishment or torment) is derived, according to his unconventional etymology, from *‘udhūbah* (sweetness), and this is taken to imply that the torment of the disobedient in the hereafter will be acceptable and void of physical pain.”⁶⁹

The relativism implicit in Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology was recognized not only by the numerous Muslim scholars who condemned him down the centuries—barbedly renaming him *al-Shaykh al-Akfar* (The Most Unbelieving Shaykh), while lamenting and actively combating his social influence⁷⁰—but also by those who accepted the validity of his Sufi experience, such as the seventeenth-century Indian Sufi reformer and self-styled “Renovator of the Second Millennium” (*Mujaddid-i Alf-i Sānī*) Ahmad Sirhindī (1564–1624). Sirhindī noted matter-of-factly of Ibn ‘Arabī that

He, thus, avers the Unity of Being and deems the existence of the possibles to be identical with the Existence of the Necessary One, the Exalted, the Sanctified; and that evil and deficiency are relative [*nisbi*], and denies the existence of pure evil and absolute deficiency. From this position, he denies that anything is evil in essence, to the point that he considers Unbelief [*kufr*] and going astray to be evil only relative to faith and to being-rightly-guided—and not in their respective essences; for he considers them the same in essence as goodness and right-guidedness.⁷¹

Allāh zāhiratan fī al-wujūd li-yu'bada fī kulli sūrah; Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-hikam*, 194. Compare the translation of Austin: Ibn Al’Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 246; and the translation of Dagli: Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones of Wisdom*, 248.

⁶⁹ Adib Nāyif Diyāb, “Ibn ‘Arabī on Human Freedom, Destiny and the Problem of Evil,” *al-Shāhara* 5 (2000) 25–43, at 40–41.

⁷⁰ On this, see Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*.

⁷¹ *va lā jaram hukm bi-vahdat-i vujūd kardah ast va vujūd-i mumkināt rā ‘ayn-i vujūd-i vājib guftah ta’ālā wa taqaddasa va sharr o naqṣ rā nisbī /nisbatī guftah nafy-i sharārat-i muṭlaq va naqṣ-i mahz kardah ast azīnjāst kih hīch chiz rā qubh / qabīh-bi-z-zāt namīdānad hattā kih kufr o žalālat rā nisbat bi-īmān va hidāyat bad mīdānad nah nisbat bi-zavāt-i khwud kih ān rā ‘ayn-i khayr o šalāh mī-angārad, Ahmad Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt-i Hażrat Imām-i Rabbānī Mujaddid-i Alf-i Sānī*, Amritsar: Matba‘ah-i Mujaddidi, 1329 h [1911], 1.4:32–33 [letter no. 234], the variants are in Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī*, 14 (of the Persian text), (compare the translation by Abdul Haq Ansari, “Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī’s Criticism of the Doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujūd*,” in Mohammad Rafique (editor), *Development of Islamic Religion and Philosophy in India*, New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2009, 171–191, at 176–177. On the relativity of good*

Sirhindī, fearing precisely that Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology “might lead common, uninitiated people to heresy and neglect of the *shari‘ah*,”⁷² sought to domesticate unbounded Sufi experience of the Unseen within the parameters of legal regulation of the Seen (producing a Sufism that subordinates its epistemological claims to Real-Truth to the final arbiting authority of the epistemology and truths of legal discourse). Sirhindī inspired an important global Sufi reform movement with that goal (headquartered in the Sufi order that has ever since borne his *imprimatur*, the Mujaddidiyyah-Naqshbandiyyah) and that has enjoyed considerable historical success in promulgating its legally-subordinate concept of Sufism as the dominant notion of Sufism in modern Islam.⁷³

The common goal of the respective projects of *hikmat al-ishrāq* and *wahdat al-wujūd* has been experiential knowledge of the Higher Truth of Existence, as distinct from the lower truths of life. Fazlur Rahman, probably the finest modern student of Islamic intellectual history (as well as the Muslim modernist-reformist thinker to confront most squarely the inconveniences presented by that history) recognized the foundational and infrastructural influence of the received discourses of Islamic philosophy on the Suhrawardian and Akbarian trajectory of ideas—and coined for this trajectory the forensic phrase, “philosophic religion.” He also recognized the central and seminal place of Suhrawardian and Akbarian “philosophic religion” in the subsequent history of societies of Muslims, and noted (unhappily):

This trend of thought profoundly influenced the whole subsequent development of metaphysical thought in Islam, both Śūfic and philosophical: its importance and depth *cannot be overestimated*.⁷⁴

and evil in Ibn ‘Arabī, see the magisterial work of A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid-Din Ibnu ‘Arabī*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939, at 156–170.

⁷² Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity*, Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1971, 67.

⁷³ Legally-subordinate Sufism (or what Marshall Hodgson famously called “Sharī‘a-minded Sufism,” Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 2:219) has been an important presence in societies of Muslims from quite early on, but has become the dominant form of Sufism only over the course of the last three centuries. Two important eleventh-century textual representatives are the Arabic *Risālah* of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (986–1072)—see the early printed edition with the super-commentary of the incumbent Shaykh of al-Azhar, Muṣṭafā al-‘Arūsi (1799–1876), on the commentary on the *Risālah* of the fifteenth-/sixteenth-century jurist, Zakariyā al-Anṣārī (d. 1520), *al-Afkār al-Qudsīyyah fi bayān ma‘āni Sharh al-Risālah al-Qushayriyah li-Zakariyā al-Anṣārī*, Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā‘ah al-Āmirah, 1873; and the Persian *Kashf-ul-Mahjūb* of the patron saint of Lahore, ‘Alī Hujvīrī (d. ca. 1072)—an early Lahore printing is ‘Alī Hujvīrī, *Kashf-ul-Mahjūb*, Lahore: Gulzār-i Hind, 1923.

⁷⁴ On “philosophic religion” see Rahman, *Islam*, 123–126; the quotation (italics mine) is in

Rahman's fundamental, and insufficiently recognized, historical point is that the Sufi and philosophical claim to a Real-Truth (*haqiqah*) that lay above and beyond the truth of the Revealed law (*shari'a*) was not a bit of intellectual or esotericist social *marginalia*, but was effectively the manifesto of a wide-ranging social and cultural phenomenon that Rahman has called "a religion not only within religion but above religion."⁷⁵ We might profitably characterize this "religion not only within religion but above religion" as the *Sufi-philosophical (or philosophical-Sufi) amalgam*.⁷⁶

Mainstream scholarship in the twenty-first century seems now, at long last, to have begun to recognize in regard to the Sufi-philosophical amalgam that its ideas, though "fantastically complex," were nonetheless "remarkably popular" and "percolated . . . widely through the population"⁷⁷—yet, in my own experience of the community of scholars (and even more so in the community of educated modern Muslim laypersons), there is still much resistance to that recognition. And when it comes to thinking about the *consequences* of this "percolation" for the task of conceptualizing "Islam" as a human and historical phenomenon, far from *overestimating* the historical presence, persistence, and influence of "Sufi-philosophical" Islam, the dominant tendency is still to very much *underestimate* it.⁷⁸

specific reference to the Illuminationist philosophy of Suhrawardī, which Rahman regarded as an exemplum of 'philosophic religion'.

⁷⁵ Rahman, *Islam*, 245; the italics are mine.

⁷⁶ The fundamental component elements of what I am calling 'the Sufi-philosophical amalgam' are duly identified by John Walbridge when he observes that "postclassical—or perhaps we should say 'mature'—Islamic philosophy could trace its origins to three roots: the Aristotelianism of Ibn Sīnā, the Neoplatonism of Suhrawardī, and the monism of Ibn 'Arabī." Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam*, 95. Forty years earlier, Seyyed Hossein Nasr noted of these "three Muslim sages" that "each speaks for a perspective which has been lived, and a world view which has been contemplated by generations of sages and seers over the centuries . . . and they demonstrate in their totality a very significant part of Islamic intellectuality, revealing horizons which have determined the intellectual life of many of the great sages of Islam," Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964, 7.

⁷⁷ Jonathan Berkey, "Islam," in Robert Irwin (editor), *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 4: Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 19–59, at 57 (Berkey is speaking here about Ibn 'Arabī; there is still less awareness of the "percolation" of al-Suhrawardī).

⁷⁸ I agree, for example, with the historiographical diagnosis made by Francis Robinson for the study of Islam in South Asia: "a distorted picture of eighteenth-century Indian Islam has grown up, which has tended to obscure the dominance of rationalist scholarship after the fashion of Farangi Mahal and mysticism in the tradition of Ibn al-'Arabī . . . this picture . . . sacrifices eighteenth-century realities to twentieth-century concerns," Robinson, "Perso-Islamic culture in India from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century," 122. The situation is little different for Ottoman studies.



The fourth question: when the most widely-copied, widely-circulated, widely-read, widely-memorized, widely-recited, widely-invoked, and widely-proverbialized book of poetry in Islamic history—a book that came to be regarded as configuring and exemplifying ideals of self-conception and modes and mechanisms of self-expression in the largest part of the Islamic world for half-a-millennium—takes as its definitive themes the ambiguous exploration of wine-drinking and (often homo-)erotic love, as well as a disparaging attitude to observant ritual piety, is that canonical work and the ethos it epitomizes *Islamic*?

I refer, of course, to the *Dīvān* (Complete Poems) of Shams-ud-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz (1320–ca.1390). The *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ was, in the period between the fifteenth and the late-nineteenth centuries, a pervasive poetical, conceptual and lexical presence in the discourse of educated Muslims in the vast geographical region extending from the Balkans through Anatolia, Iran and Central Asia down and across Afghanistan and North India to the Bay of Bengal that was home to the absolute demographic majority of Muslims on the planet (the historical constitution of which has already been noted, above, with regard to the teaching in *madrasahs* of the basic philosophical-theological handbook, the *Hidāyat al-hikmah*). To this temporal-geographical entity I will henceforth refer as the *Balkans-to-Bengal complex*. The *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ consists of about five hundred *ghazals* in Persian: the *ghazal* being a poem written in rhyming couplets in the voice of a lover on the theme of loving an impossibly beautiful and habitually unattainable beloved.

The performative *mise-en-scène* for the *ghazal* is a drinking-assembly of the poet's social peers where the shared individual experience of loving is configured in and expressed by the consumption of *wine* as the definitive medium for the intoxication (that is, deepening and heightening and expanding) of the physical and imaginal senses. The *ghazal* became the pre-eminent literary form of self-construction and self-articulation—the *literary* being a discourse that is socially valorized as being rhetorically worked, experientially charged, and imaginarily invested for the purpose of creating, retaining and communicating social and existential meaning. The *ghazal* played this function most especially in societies of Muslims speaking Persian, (different types of) Turkish, and Urdu in the world of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex; Ḥāfiẓ being recognized as the most celebrated exemplar of this highly inter-allusive, inter-referential, and inter-textual discourse. It is most telling that the two most important commentaries on Ḥāfiẓ were composed in the middle

of the historical age of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex by two contemporaries from the distant geographical poles of the region: Ahmed Südi of Sarajevo (d. 1598),⁷⁹ and Abū-l-Hasan Khātamī of Lahore (*fl.* 1617).⁸⁰

The centrality of the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ to the constitution of a paradigm of identity for Muslims in the world of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (which, as I shall argue towards the end of this chapter, is a historically dominant paradigm of the self-construction and self-articulation of Muslims)—that is, the centrality of the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ to the historical *being* of Muslims—runs no risk of overstatement, yet its significance is rarely stated in these terms. In a recent attempt to set the record straight, Leonard Lewisohn rightly refers to the “the Hāfiżocentrism of Persianate civilization” by which he means:

all the Persianate civilizations of Islamdom (Ottoman Turkey, Safavid and Qajar Persia, Timurid Central Asia and Mughal India . . .) have for the past five centuries been “Hāfiżocentric” as well. Up to the 1950s, Muslim children in Iran and Afghanistan and India were taught first to memorize the Qur’ān, and secondly to commit the poetry of Hāfiẓ to heart, thus absorbing in their grammar-school curriculum the sacred and revealed book of Islam alongside the verses of the inspired “Tongue of the Invisible.” From Istanbul to Lahore, from the Persian Gulf to thithermost Transoxania, for some five centuries the “Book” of Islam—the Qur’ān—has in this fashion shared pride of place beside Hāfiẓ’s *Dīvān*.⁸¹

Hāfiżian discourse regards itself squarely as falling under the phenomenal dome of the Muḥammadan Revelation. Hāfiẓ himself was an accomplished student of the commentary on the Qur’ān most widely taught in *madrasahs* throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, the *Kashshāf* of the Khwaraz-

⁷⁹ Südi Bosnevi, *Şerh-i Dīvān-i Hāfiẓ*, in the margins of Mehmed Vehbi Qonevi, *Şerh-i Dīvān-i Hāfiẓ*, Istanbul: Matba‘ah-i ‘Āmireh, 1872; see also Muhammad Südi Bosnevi, *Şarh-i Südi bar Dīvān-i Hāfiẓ* (translated into Persian by Ȧsmat Sattarzādeh), Tehran: Nigāh, 1387 *sh*.

⁸⁰ Abū-l-Hasan Khātamī Lahōri, *Şarh-i ‘irfāni-yi ghazal-hā-yi Hāfiẓ* (edited by Bahā-ud-Dīn Khurramshāhi, Kürüş Manṣūri, and Ḥusayn Mu’ti’i Amin), Tehran: Nashr-i Qatrāh, 1374 *sh* [1995].

⁸¹ Leonard Lewisohn, “Socio-historical and Literary Contexts; Hāfiẓ in Shīrāz,” in Leonard Lewisohn (editor), *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2010, 3–30, at 16. Two leading scholars of Ottoman literature speak more specifically of the “Hafezan” character of Ottoman poetry “in that it looked to Persian models (among which the poetry of the fourteenth-century master poet Hafez stood out),” Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, 195. Some sense of the influence of Hāfiẓ in the Indian subcontinent may be obtained from Sayyidah Chānd Bibi, *Hāfiż-shināsi dar shibh-i-qārrah (bar rasī-yi sharh-hā-yi fārsī-yi Dīvān-i Hāfiẓ dar shibh-i qārrah)*, Islamabad: Markaz-i Tahqīqāt-i Fārsi-yi Īrān va Pākistān, 2007.

mīān Mu‘tazili-rationalist Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), and declared of himself:

No Qur’ān-scholar beneath the prayer-niche-dome of the heavens can
ever know
The blessing I have had from the wealth of the Qur’ān.⁸²

The word I am translating here as “Qur’ān-scholar” is, of course, *hāfiẓ*: hence the *double-entendre*, “No Hāfiẓ beneath the prayer-niche-dome of the heavens can ever know . . .” Hāfiẓ is here presenting himself alongside all the other Hāfiẓes/*hāfiẓes*: that is, alongside every other Muslim who has ever sought meaningfully to engage with “the wealth of the Qur’ān.” Indeed, Hāfiẓ’s poetry was itself conceived of by the society of his readers in none other than *revelatory* terms: it was the Olympian personage of Nūr-ud-Dīn Jāmī of Herat (d. 1492), philosopher, poet, and pre-eminent translator of the cosmology of Ibn ‘Arabī into Persian verse, who bestowed upon Hāfiẓ the appellation by which he would hence be known: *Lisān-ul-Ghayb*, the “Tongue of the Unseen.”⁸³ As a prefatory inscription to a royally-commissioned scholarly edition of the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ prepared in Herat in 1501 proclaims:

This treasure-house of meanings devoid of imperfection
Is the impress from that Book of *No-Doubt*;
Famous in the world as the emanation of the *Holy Spirit*;
Spoken upon the tongues as the “Tongue of the Unseen.”⁸⁴

The “Book of *No-Doubt*” (*ṣahīfah-i lā-rayb*) to which the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ is here likened is, of course, the Qur’ān itself (in the words of its famous self-affirmation: *kitāb lā rayba fī-hi*;⁸⁵ “a book wherein is no doubt”). The Qur’ānic phrase I have translated here as *Holy Spirit* (*rūḥ al-qudus*, more accurately

⁸² hīch hāfiẓ na-kunad dar kham-i miḥrāb-i falak / īn tana“um kih man az dawlat-i qur’ān kardam; Khwājah Shams-ud-Dīn Muhammad Hāfiẓ, *Dīvān-e Hāfiẓ* (edited by Parvīz Nātil Khānlāri), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khwārazmī, 1362 sh [1983] (2nd edition), ghazal 312. (Compare the translation of Lewisohn, “Socio-historical and Literary Contexts: Hāfiẓ in Shirāz,” 17).

⁸³ On Jāmī, see now Hamid Algar, *Jāmi*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁸⁴ īn ganj-i ma‘āni kih tuhī az ‘ayb ast / naqsh-īst kih az ṣahīfah-i lā rayb ast // mashhūr-i jahān ba-fayz-i rūḥ-ul-qudus ast / mazkūr-i zabānhā bih lisān-ul-ghayb ast; see Hans Robert Roemer, *Staatschreiben der Timuridenzeit: Das Šārafnāmä des ‘Abdallāh Marwārid in Kritischer Auswertung*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1952, 97a. Compare the translation by Hossein Ziai, “Hāfez, *Lisān al-Ghayb* of Persian Poetic Wisdom,” in Alma Giese and J. Christoph Bürgel (editors), *Gott ist schön und Er liebt die Schönheit / God is beautiful and He loves beauty: Festschrift für Annemarie Schimmel zum 7. April 1992 dargebracht von Schülern, Freunden und Kollegen / Festchrift in honour of Annemarie Schimmel presented by students, friends and colleagues on April 7, 1992*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1992, 449–469, at 453.

⁸⁵ Qur’ān 2:2 al-Baqarah.

rendered as “Spirit of the Blessed,” or “Spirit of the Pure”) is identified by the Qur’ān as the agent of Divine Revelation to Muḥammad⁸⁶ (and thus generally construed as the Angel Jibril/Gabriel). Thus, the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ is here conceived of as a *simulacrum* to the Book of God sent down upon Muḥammad. The social prevalence of this notion of Hāfiẓ is evident not only in the fact that another famous sixteenth-century introduction to his *Dīvān* invokes the Qur’ān’s famous description of the Divine Revelation to Muḥammad to say that Hāfiẓ “cast, upon the horizons and within the souls, the echo of the essence of *He does not speak of his own desire; truly, it is none other than an Inspiration inspired*,”⁸⁷ but also in the utter ubiquity, in the historical societies of Balkans-to-Bengal down to the twentieth century, of the everyday oracular practice of using copies of the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ for divination (*fāl*) —that is, for what one might call “quotidian prophecy,” an operation initiated by the recitation by the augury-seeker of either or both of the *Fātiḥah* (opening chapter of the Qur’ān) and the *durūd sharīf* (invocation of Divine blessings upon the Prophet), accompanied by the entreaty:

O! Hāfiẓ of Shīrāz:
 You, the privy-companion of every secret!
 I seek but one secret:
 You are the unveiler of all secrets!⁸⁸

An engaging Ottoman work, the *Rāznāmeh* (*Book of Secrets*) of Kefeli Hüsayn (d. 1601), which is a collection of anecdotes about the real-life contemporaries of its author in which almost every story ends in the protagonists turning (often in a crisis) to a copy of the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ to obtain a divinatory prophecy, shows clearly not only that to know Hāfiẓ was a *sine qua non* for an Ottoman Muslim gentleman to function in society, but also indicates the widespread circulation of copies of the work (in these real-life sixteenth-century

⁸⁶ See Qur’ān 16:102 al-Nahl: “Say! *rūh al-qudus* has sent it down from your Sustainer with the Truth [*qul nazzala-hu rūh al-qudusi min rabbi-ka bi-al-haqqa!*]”

⁸⁷ *va şadā-yi fahvā-yi wa mā yanṭiq ‘an al-hawā in huwa illā wahyun yūḥā dar ḥafāq va anfus andākht*; cited in Ziai, “Hāfez, *Lisān al-Ghayb*,” 453, footnote 11 (compare Ziai’s translation); the phrase in italics in the translation (and in bold in the transliteration) is Qur’ān 53:3–4 al-Najm. The Persian phrase “on the horizons and within the souls” is a gesture to Qur’ān 41:53 Fuṣīlat: “We shall show them our Signs on the horizons and in themselves [*sa-nuri-him āyāti-nā fi al-āfāqi wa fi anfusi-him*.]

⁸⁸ *yā Hāfiẓ-i Shirāzī / tū maḥram-i har rāzī / man ṭālib-i yak fālam/ tū kāshif-i har rāzī*. I have the text of this invocation by oral tradition; for another version where the second line reads *bar man nazār andāzī* (“Look to me!”), see Tahsin Yazıcı, “Hāfiẓ-i Şirāzī,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İSAM, 1988–2013, 15:103–106, at 104. The historical continuity of the practice is nicely illustrated in the fact that the numerous early printed editions of Hāfiẓ’s *Dīvān* were invariably issued with divination tables in the end papers.

narratives, a copy of the *Dīvān* seems always to be ready-to-hand on a nearby table or wall-niche or in someone's coat-pocket), as well as the special powers invested in the book by its readers, reciters and rehearsers.⁸⁹ Hāfiẓ's poetry is, indeed, as Daryush Shayegan so eloquently put it:

The intimate interlocutor of every heart in distress, of every soul that is seized by mystical exaltation . . . every listener seems to find in it an answer to his question, every reader thinks he is discovering an allusion to his desire, every man finds in him a sympathetic interlocutor capable of understanding his secret . . . hence this connivance of the poet with all his readers.⁹⁰

Now, the definitive conceptual, experiential and expressive register of the Hāfiẓian *ghazal*—which Shayegan has called “the *humanitas* of Islam”⁹¹—is *ambiguity* (“ability to be understood in more than one way”)⁹² and *ambivalence* (“the co-existence in one person or one work of contradictory emotions or attitudes towards the same object or situation”).⁹³ Love in the *ghazal* is at once carnal love, as well as chaste Platonic love, and love for/of the Divine; the beloved is at once the tantalizing fleshly object of physical desire, as well a beautiful youth who manifests and thus bears witness (*shāhid*) by virtue of his/her chaste beauty to the Beauty of the Divine, or is simply God Himself; the wine of the *ghazal* is at once the red liquid imbibed in metal cups by boon-companions in their social gatherings (*majlis, mahfil*) where the *ghazal* is recited (both in literary conceit and in actual social practice), and/or an image that conveys the experience of intoxication with the Divine. The socially-pervasive language of the *ghazal*, a language in which people thought about and fashioned their experience of the self and in which they spoke to each other about the individual and collective self, is thus a language that expresses, not merely a theoretical tension between legal and non-legal norms—but the very ethos of a lived reality comprising a plurality of evidently contradictory meanings in life.

⁸⁹ Kefeli Hüsayn, *Rāznāme* (edited by İ. Hakkı Aksoyak), Cambridge: The Department of Near Eastern Studies and Civilizations, Harvard University, 2004. On this work, see J. Schmidt, “Hāfiẓ and Other Persian Authors in Ottoman Bibliomancy; the Extraordinary Case of Kefevi Hüsayn Efendi’s *Rāznāme* (Late Sixteenth Century),” *Persica* 21 (2006–2007) 63–74; and Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise, nor Hellfire*.

⁹⁰ Daryush Shayegan, “The Visionary Topography of Hafiz,” *Temenos* 6 (1985) 207–233, at 207, and 209.

⁹¹ Shayegan, “The Visionary Topography of Hafiz,” 208.

⁹² *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (edited by Lesley Brown), Oxford: Clarendon, 1993, 64.

⁹³ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 64.

Hāfiżian discourse—and the prodigious historical community that engaged with it—interrogates, in and from the communal social space of the *ghazal*, the worldviews and values of the jurist (*faqih*) and the preacher (*vā'iż*) and the ascetic Sufi (*zāhid*), and asserts the norms and values of the *ghazal*.

The following is a smattering of famously representative couplets that convey those norms and values:

Hāfiż; drink wine, live in non-conforming-libertinage [*rindi*], be
happy, but do not

Like others, make the Qur'ān a snare of deception.⁹⁴

If the jurist admonishes you against love-play,
Give him a bowl of wine; tell him to loosen his mind!⁹⁵

Ascetic! Since from your prayers nothing is forthcoming:
I shall with nightly drunkenness and secret lover's talk!⁹⁶

Since the wine-bearer was a moon-faced beloved, and a
keeper-of-secrets,
Hāfiż drank from the wine-cup, and so did the *shaykh* and
the jurist.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Hāfiżā may khwur u rindī kun u khwush bāsh valī / dām-i tazvīr makun chun digarān Qur'ān rā; Hāfiż, *Dīvān-e Hāfiż*, ghazal 9. The word I am inadequately translating as “non-conforming-libertinage” is, of course, *rindi*, a concept deeply meaningful to all readers of Hāfiż and Hāfiżian literature, but that requires a monograph to itself. Perhaps the best rendering so far is that of Daryush Shayegan: “This term . . . evokes a lively lucidity, a *savoir faire*, an authentic detachment from the things of this world, suggesting the deliverance of the man who, shaking off his tawdry finery, lays himself open without shame, and naked to the mirror of the worlds . . . Equally in this concept we find a sense of immoderacy, a behaviour out of the ordinary, shocking, scandalous, able to disorient the most composed spirits, a non-conformity which derives not so much from ostentation as from the explosive exuberance of a vision so rich, so full, that it cannot manifest itself without doing violence to everyday banality and without breaking the limits defined by the normality of things. This term expresses, further, a predilection for the uncertain, for language that is veiled and masked, for hints and insinuations, which in the authentic *rend* are expressed in inspired paradoxes . . . Finally, there is in this concept a boundless love of the divine . . . The word *rend* sums up a whole anthropology; I would say a whole anthroposophy,” Shayegan, “The Visionary Topography of Hafiz,” 224–225. See also Naṣr-Allāh Pūrjāvādī, “Rindi-yi Hāfiż,” in Naṣr-Allāh Pūrjāvādī, *Bū-yi jān: maqālah-hā'i dar bārah-'i shi'r-i 'irfānī-yi fārsī*, Tehran: Markaz-i Nasr-i Dānišgāh, 1372 sh [1993], 214–288.

⁹⁵ wa-gar faqih naṣīḥat kunad kih 'ishq mabāz / piyālah'i bidahash gū dimāgh rā tar kun; Hāfiż, *Dīvān-i Hāfiż*, ghazal 389.

⁹⁶ zāhid chu az namāz-i tu kārī namīravad / ham mastī-yi shabānah u rāz u niyāz-i man; Hāfiż, *Dīvān-i Hāfiż*, ghazal 392.

⁹⁷ sāqī chu yār-i mahrukh u az ahl-i rāz būd / Hāfiż bikhwurd bādāh u shaykh u faqih ham; Hāfiż, *Dīvān-i Hāfiż*, ghazal 302.

Around the Sacred House of the wine-vat, Hāfiż—
If he does not die—head-over-heels will go!⁹⁸

The umbrella-term given to the paradigmatic ethos and aesthetic associated with Hāfiżian discourse, as well as with the composite discourse of other diverse pillars of the Balkans-to-Bengal Persian canon, such as Niẓāmī, Sa‘dī, ‘Atṭār, Rūmī, and Jāmī (onto each of whom this ethical and aesthetical paradigm configures quite differently) is the “*madhhab* of Love” (*madhhab-i ishq*). The word *madhhab* means, literally, “way of going.” Expressed in this nomenclature is precisely that love is *a way of going about being Muslim*—a mode of being with God, of identifying, experiencing and living with the values and meaning of Divine Truth. Earthly love—the love for human beauty—is metaphorical love (*‘ishq-i majāzī*), and is the experiential means by which to come to know Real-True Love, or love for/in Real-Truth.⁹⁹ In the famous lines of Jāmī:

Try even a hundred different things in this world –
It is love alone that will free you from your Self.
Do not turn from love of a fair-face, even if it be metaphorical [*majāzī*],
Though it be not Real [*haqīqī*], it is a preparatory.
For, if you do not first study “A” and “B” on a slate,
How, then, will you take lessons in the Qur’ān?
It is said that a disciple went to a Sufi master
That he might guide him upon his journey:
The master said, “If you have not yet set foot in the realm of love;
Go! First, become a lover—and only after that come back to us!
For, without having emptied the wine-cup of the Form [*ṣūrat*],
You will not attain to taste the draught of Meaning [*ma‘nī*].
Do not, though, tarry overlong with the Figure [*ṣūrat*],
But bring yourself swift across this bridge!”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *gird-i bayt-ul-ḥarām-i khum Hāfiż / gar namīrad bih sar bipūyad bāz*, Hāfiż, *Dīvān-e Hāfiż*, *ghazal* 256.

⁹⁹ A tidy summary is Husayn Ilahi-Ghomshesi, “The Principles of the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry,” in Leonard Lewisohn (editor), *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2010, 77–106.

¹⁰⁰ *bi-gītī gar chih ṣad kār āzmā’i / hamīn ‘ishqat dahad az khwud rahā’i// matāb az ‘ishq-i rū khwud majāzī-st / kih ān nahy-i haqīqī kārsāzī-st // bi-lawh avval alif bī tā nakhwāni / zi Qur’ān dars khwāndan kī tavānī // shanidam shud murīdi pay-yi pīrī / kih bāshad dar sulūk-ash dastgīrī // bigufī ar pā nashud dar ‘ishqat az jāy / buraw ‘ašiq shaw ān-kīh pīsh-i mā āy // kih bī jām-i may-i ḫūrat kashīdan / nayārī jur‘ah-’i ma’nā hashīdan // valī bāyad kih dar ḫūrat namāni / va-z-īn pul zūd khwud rā biguzaranī*, Nūr-ud-Din Muḥammad Jāmī, *Masnavī-yi Haft Awrang* (edited by Āqā Murtāzā Mudarris-i Gilānī), Tehran: Kitābfarūshī-yi Sa‘dī, 1337 sh [1958], 594.

However, the relationship between metaphorical and Real-True love is anything but a straightforward linear progression from one thing to another: rather, as is the case with the relation between any metaphor and the meaning that the metaphor *configures*, the relationship is altogether more ambiguous (which is a point that will be taken up fully in Part 3 of this book). In the conceptualization and practice of the *madhab-i 'ishq* the beloved is, at once, both the external object-form for metaphorical love *and* the source for the derivation of Real-meaning. Thus, in exemplifying one of the most famous and profound love affairs in the way and lore of the *madhab-i 'ishq*, Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī invokes his truth-transfiguring beloved, Shams-i Tabrīz, thus:

Shams-i Tabrīz: your form [*sūrat*] is beautiful!
And in meaning [*ma'nī*]: what a beautiful source!¹⁰¹

That the meaningful love of the *madhab-i 'ishq* encompassed and fused *in ambiguity* both carnal and spiritual love is summed up in the following couplets from one of the most famous *ghazals* of Rūmī in which the poet addresses his earthly beloved as follows:

If anyone asks you about the houris; show your cheek, say:
“Like this!”
If anyone asks you about the moon, ascend to the roof; say:
“Like this!”
If anyone is in search of a fairy; show your own face;
If anyone speaks of the scent of musk; loosen your hair, say:
“Like this!”
If anyone asks, “How do the clouds reveal the moon?”
Untie your shirt, knot by knot, say: “Like this!”
If anyone asks, “How did Jesus raise the dead?”
Kiss me on the lips and say: “Like this!”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ *Shams-i Tabrīz sūratat khwush / v-andar ma'nī chih khwush ma'inī*, Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i Shams-i Tabrizi* (edited by Badi'-uz-Zamān Furūzunfar), Tehran: Nashr-i Paymān, 1379 sh [2000], 653 (ghazal 2760).

¹⁰² *Har kih zi hür pursadat rukh binamā kih hamchunin / har kih zi māh gūyadat bām bar-ā kih hamchunin // har kih parī talab kunad chihrāh-'i khwud bi-du namā / har kih zi mushk dam zanad zulf gushā kih hamchunin // har kih bigūyadat zi māh chiāgūnah v shavad / bāz gushā girih girih band-i qabā kih hamchunin / gar zi Masīh pursadat murdah chigūnah zindah kard / būsah bidih bih pish-i ü jān-i marā kih hamchunin*, Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i Shams-i Tabrizi*, 653 (ghazal 1826). I have barely departed from the translation of Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998, 146, who cites this *ghazal* in illustrating Rūmī's "juxtaposing the spiritual and the carnal."

In this celebrated example of the ambi-valent condition of love as *both* carnal and ideal, as both *majāzī* and *haqiqī*, the sensual kiss of Rūmī’s luminous, musky, bare-chested, paradisaical lover upon the poet’s lips is (and is not) the miraculous soul-resurrecting kiss of the Messiah himself.

The philosophical foundations of the idea of the cosmological *value* of love are to be found already in Ibn Sīnā, who wrote in his *Epistle on Love* that “love is the manifestation of Essence and Existence”—meaning that Love is the manifestation of God, Essence and Existence being consubstantial in God in Ibn Sīnā’s conceptualization of Him.¹⁰³ The intrinsic and instrumental social and human value of love is plainly stated in a long chapter entitled “On the Virtue of Love, By Means of Which Societies Are Bound Together,” in the most widely read work of political thought and social ethics in the history of societies of Muslims, the Persian-language *Ethics* (*Akhlāq*) of Naṣīr-ud-Dīn Tūṣī (1201–1274)—itself based on the chapter on “Love and Friendship” in the Arabic-language *Refinement of Ethics* (*Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*) of Miskawayh (d. 1030)—which presents love as a definitive constituent of a shared Muslim identity, and as a virtue superior even to justice:

The people of the Virtuous City, although they are different from one part of the world to another, are in reality in concord, for their hearts are upright one towards the other, and are adorned with love one towards the other. In their close-knit affection, they are like a single individual. As the *shari‘ah*-giver, peace be upon him, says: “Muslims are a single hand against all others, and are as one soul.”¹⁰⁴

The need for Justice . . . arises from the absence of love, for if love were to accrue between individuals, there would be no necessity for equity and impartiality . . . In this regard, the virtue of Love over Justice is obvious.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ See now the convenient treatment of this in Maha Elkaily Freimuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, 74–118 (the chapter entitled “God and ‘ishq in the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā”), the quote from Ibn Sīnā is cited at 83. See also Joseph Norment Bell, “Avicenna’s Treatise on Love and the Nonphilosophical Muslim Tradition,” *Der Islam* 63 (1986) 73–89.

¹⁰⁴ *va ahl-i madinah-yi fāzilah agar-chih mukhtalif bāshand dar aqāṣī-yi ‘ālam bi-haqiqat mut-taqīq bāshand chih dīlhā-yi īshān bā yakdīgar rāst buvad va bi-maḥabbat-i yak-dīgar mutaḥallī bāshand va mānand-i yak shakhṣ bāshand dar ta’alluf va tavaddud chwūnān-kih shārī‘ ‘alay-hi-as-salām gūyad: al-muslimūn yadun wāhidatun ‘alā man siwā-hum, Khwājah Naṣīr-ud-Dīn Tūṣī, Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* (edited by Mujtabā Minavī and ‘Ali-Rizā Haydarī), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khwārazmī, 1387 sh (6th edition), 285–286. Compare the translation by G. M. Wickens in *Naṣīr-ud-Dīn Tūṣī, The Nasirean Ethics* (translated by G. M. Wickens), London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964, 215.

¹⁰⁵ *pas ma'lūm shud kih iħtiyyāġ bih ‘adħalat . . . az jahat-i fiqdān-i maħabbat-ast chih agar*

That Muslims have conceived of love as more than “mere emotion” was well-recognized half-a-century ago by Helmut Ritter who wrote in a magnificent study on the significance and meaning of the concept and practice of love in the history of societies of Muslims:

There is a spiritual power which is suited above all other to promote the soul’s concentration on another being, to suppress and eliminate all other ties and interests, to make that being the center of one’s feelings, and from within this emotionally laden center to dominate all aspects of life and to determine all expression in life; a power which is more effective than any other efforts at overcoming restraints and hindrances, which can traverse the distance of a day’s travel in minutes and performs achievements of high aspiration where all other efforts fail. The power in question is love. It provides the mystic with assistance to attain his goal, closeness to God, and to achieve union with him.

In the case of the lover the intensity of feeling is stronger, the capacity for suffering and endurance is greater, the happiness of proximity is higher than with the world-renouncing ascetic and the saint of actions who sees the purpose of his existence in acts of obedience . . . Love has its own laws and specific qualities of emotion which makes it more than simply a means of intensifying other spiritual emotions.¹⁰⁶

In the literature of the “*madhab* of Love” (which is, of course, not limited to the works of the above-listed authors; rather, it encompasses a vast textual corpus produced down the centuries in their paradigmatical image and tenor), the world-view and life-way that is human love for Divine Beauty manifest as earthly beauty, is valorized as the paramount human sensation, sensibility,

maḥabbat miyān-i ashkhāṣ ḥasīl būdī bih inṣāf va intiṣāf iḥtiyāj nayuftādī . . . pas bidīn vujūh fażīlat-i mahabbat bar ‘adālat ma’lūm shud, Tūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣiri*. I have slightly amended the translation by Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 196. See Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (edited by Constantine K. Zurayk), Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1966, 135–173; see the translation by Constantine K. Zurayk, *The Refinement of Character* (A translation from the Arabic of Aḥmad ibn-Muhammad Miskawayh’s *Tahdhīb al-Akhlaq*), Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1968, 123–154. On love in Tūsī’s political theory, see Christian Jambet, “Idéal du politique et politique idéale selon Naṣir al-Din Tūsī,” in N. Pourjavady and Ž. Vesel (editors), *Naṣir al-Din Tūsī: Philosophe et savant du xiiie siècle*, Tehran: Presses Universitaires d’Iran / Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 2000, 31–57, at 46–55.

¹⁰⁶ Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār* (translated by John O’Kane with Bernd Radtke), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003, 358–359 (first published as *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Fariduddin ‘Aṭṭār*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955). Ritter’s study is a remarkably rich and clear exposition of the ideas, values and literary vehicles of the *madhab*-i ‘ishq.

action and condition. Love functions as an elevating experience for the realization, apprehension, and experience of the values and higher Truth. It functions, in other words—as in the foregoing verses by Hāfiẓ—as a mode of knowing, of valorizing and meaning-making, and as the medium for the mobilization and incorporation of these meanings and values into a manner and ethos and critical principle of living “by means of which societies are bound together.”

There is still inadequate awareness and recognition of the central place of the idea and practice of love in the historical discourses and practices constructive and expressive of being Muslim. An important corrective is a massive recent work on the role of love in the history of the discourses of Muslims that takes up where Ritter left off. The distinguished author William C. Chittick prefaced his opus with the statement “Those familiar with the histories and literatures of the Islamic peoples know that love . . . is so central to the overall ethos of the religion that if any word can sum up Islamic spirituality—by which I mean the very heart of the Qur’anic message—it should surely be *love*. I used to think that *knowledge* deserved this honor and that the Orientalist Franz Rosenthal had it right in the title of his book *Knowledge Triumphant*. Now I think that *love* does a better job of conveying the nature of the quest for God that lies at the tradition’s heart.”¹⁰⁷ I suggest, however, that rather than to draw a sharp distinguishing line between “love” and “knowledge,” it is more accurate to conceive of love as construed and practiced by the *madhab-i ‘ishq* precisely as a register or *type of knowing*: the *experience* of love is a learning experience (or an experience of learning) that *teaches* the lover how to identify value (i.e., what is valuable) and to constitute the human being—both as individual and as society—accordingly, in terms of those values.¹⁰⁸ Some of us may find it a challenge to conceive of love

¹⁰⁷ William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, xi. In his magisterial study, Rosenthal argued boldly that “in Islam, the concept of knowledge enjoyed an importance unparalleled in other civilizations” and asserted that “*ilm* [knowledge] is Islam,” Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970, 334 and 3.

¹⁰⁸ A straightforward modern expression of this is the following lines by the most-widely read Urdu poet of the second half of the twentieth century, Faiz Ahmed Faiz (Fayż Ahmad Fayż), in a poem addressed “To the Rival-Lover! [*raqib se!*]”, where the literary tradition of the *madhab-i ‘ishq* becomes an instrument by which to learn the values of human sympathy and solidarity: “You have seen that brow, that cheek, that lip / In contemplation of which I laid waste my life / Those dream-lost spell-binding eyes have raised themselves up to you / You know well the reason for my lost years / We share the favours bestowed by the sorrow of love’s-devotion / So many favours that in the counting remain uncountable / What did I lose in this love? What did I learn? / Were I to explain to any other than you, I could not make them understood / I learned helplessness, I learned to protect the poor / I learned the meaning of despair and deprivation, of pain and sorrow / I understood the travails of the constrained and coerced / I learned the mean-

as a rigorous or far-reaching principle for knowing, valorization or meaning-making. It may in this regard be instructive to consider the argument of the anthropologist, Richard Shweder, for the mobilization of a love-centered ethos of “romanticism” as a mode for the practice of the scholarly field of cultural anthropology:

The practical result of romanticism’s doctrine is a *revaluation* of . . . beauty as the figure of truth . . . love as the realization of our veritable nature; language in general, and poetic language in particular, as the divine expressive instruments of the real; adventure, astonishment and cultural anthropology as proper responses to the variety of inspiring manifestations of pure being in the world . . . For the aim of romanticism is to revalue existence, not to denigrate pure being; to dignify subjective experience, not to deny reality; to appreciate the imagination, not to disregard reason . . . Romanticism inclines towards an interest in those inspirations . . . that take us beyond our senses to real places where even logic cannot go.¹⁰⁹

The protagonists of the *madhab-i ‘ishq* would agree.

In the prolific literary discourses of the *madhab-i ‘ishq*, the experiential and discursive registers of the spiritual and the physical are collapsed into each other in a synthetic Sufi-philosophical conceptual and imaginal vocabulary that con-figures the registers of the literal and the metaphorical—a vocabulary of concepts and images so widespread in its usage as to be effectively, as Dick Davis acutely put it, “a *lingua franca* . . . the conventional rhetoric of Persian poetry, what we may call its dialect.”¹¹⁰ The major works

ing of chill sighs, of yellow faces / . . . When the labourer’s flesh is sold in the marketplace / When the blood of the poor flows in the street / Something like a fire stays burning in my heart— do not ask! / No control over my heart is left to me [tū nē dékhī hay voh pēshānī voh rukhsār voh hōnī / zindagī jin kē taṣavvur mēn lutā di ham nē / tujh pē utthī hayn voh khōī hu’i sāhir ānkhēn / tujh kō ma'lūm hay kyūn ‘umr gañvādī ham nē / ham pih mushtarakah hayn ihsān ghām-i ulfat kē / itnē ihsān kih ginvā’ūn tō ginvā nah sakūn / ham nē is ‘ishq mēn kyā khōyā hay kyā sikhā hay/ juz tērē awr kō samjhā’ūn tō samjhā nah sakūn / ‘ajīzī sikhi gharibōn kī himāyat sikhi / zēr-dastōn kē masā’ib kō samajhnā sikhā / sard āhōn kē rukh-i zard kē ma’nī sikhē / . . . jab kahīn biktā hay bāzār mēn mazdūr kā gōsh / shāhirāhōn pih gharibōn kā lahū behtā hai / āg sī sinē mēn reh reh kē ubaltī hay nah pūchh / apnē dil par mujhē qābū hī nahīn rehtā hay], Fayż Aḥmad Fayż, *Naqsh-i Faryādi*, 60–62, in Fayż Aḥmad Fayż, *Nuskħah-hā’-i Vafā*, Lahore: Maktabah-i Kāravān, 1984, 68–70. I have benefited from, and sometimes reproduced, the translation of V. G. Kiernan, *Poems by Faiz*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971, 74–75.

¹⁰⁹ Richard A. Shweder, *Thinking Through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, 10–11.

¹¹⁰ Dick Davis, “Sufism and Poetry: A Marriage of Convenience,” *Edebiyat* 10 (1999) 279–292, at 280, and 281.

of this literature were, with the sole exception of the Qur’ān itself, the most widely-copied (and, with the eventual spread of the technology in the nineteenth century, widely-printed) and widely-consumed texts throughout this vast Balkans-to-Bengal region. Collectively, they provided a language for thinking, and reading, and communicating and living—that is, for *a way of going about (madhab)* the articulation, narration, celebration, recitation, transmission, performance and exploration in the self and in society of meaning and value. These discourses, and their accompanying practices, expressed and embodied a mode of valorization—that is of setting the values of things, as positive or negative—and thus put forward a complex of values and meanings as *norms*—as “what is expected or regarded as normal.”¹¹¹ For any Muslim to enter into the social, textual, imaginal and experiential space of the literary discourses of the Balkans-to-Bengal canon—that is, to recite a *ghazal* to oneself, or to be present in a *majlis* where one was recited, or to experience or imagine loving or wine-drinking in terms of the discursively-pervasive vocabulary of the *ghazal*—was necessarily to engage with the *normative* value-and meaning-claims of the *madhab-i ishq* (normative claims are “claims to establishing a norm or standard”).¹¹² Now, the word *madhab*, which is usually translated as “school,” is, of course, the term used to designate a *madhab*/school of Islamic law—thus, the Hanafi *madhab*, the Shāfi‘ī *madhab*, the Mālikī *madhab*, the Hanbali *madhab*, and the Ja‘farī *madhab*—and, certainly, the practitioners of *madhab-i ishq* were all associated with one or another of these legal *madhhabs*. Yet alongside these legal *madhhabs*, whose norms we might, by ingrained force of cognitive habit, be more readily inclined to call “religious” or “Islamic,” the Sufi-philosophical-aesthetical *madhab-i ishq* posited its own prolific normative claims in society with Love as the primary principle and value.

(How) are these truth-claims *Islamic*? One the one hand, Omid Safi has noted that “It is important to point out that these Sufis were not abrogating the established theological and legal schools, nor were they dismissing their relevance. In fact many of the Sufis . . . were themselves important members of these other ‘schools’ as well . . . The Sufis of the Path of Love were presenting not a new religion, but a fresh, dynamic, and ever transforming understanding of themselves, the world around them, and the Divine based primarily on love.”¹¹³ On the other hand, whether or not the protagonists of the *madhab-i ishq* were “dismissing the relevance” of the legal schools—and if

¹¹¹ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1939.

¹¹² *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1940.

¹¹³ Omid Safi, “On the Path of Love Towards the Divine: A Journey with the Muslim Mystics,” *Sufi* 78 (2009–2010) 22–36, at 28.

not dismissing outright, many of them were, without doubt, meaningfully *qualifying* the relevance and scope of the truth-claims of the legal schools—the question to be considered is precisely what the implications and consequences are for normative Islam of a discourse whose practitioners insistently argued for an “understanding of themselves, the world around them, and the Divine based primarily on love.” What are the implications and consequences for normative Islam of a statement such as that with which, Amīr Hasan Sijzī of Delhi (1254–1338), poet, Sufi, and compiler of one of the most famous books of Islam in South Asian, the *Favā'id-ul-Fuvād*, comes to conclude his *Dīvan*:

The work of the lover is the work of the heart:

Those meanings are beyond Belief [*dīn*] and Unbelief [*kufr*].¹¹⁴

We will see in Chapter 5 that this idea of “meanings beyond Belief and Unbelief” was an absolutely standard one, widely-heard in the self-expression of Muslims in the literature of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. J. Christoph Bürgel, one of the most original and supple-minded scholars of the literary discourses of Muslims, says of Hāfiẓ’s poetry that “on reading these verses one gets the impression of facing something like a counter-religion.”¹¹⁵ Now, Bürgel does not say what he means by “counter-religion,” but if we understand the term in parallel with the well-established concept “counter-culture,” then we are talking about “a mode of life deliberately deviating from established social practices”¹¹⁶ or “the culture and lifestyle of those people . . . who reject or oppose the dominant values of society”¹¹⁷ or “a subculture whose values and norms of behavior deviate from those of mainstream society, often in opposition to mainstream cultural mores.”¹¹⁸ My point, however, is that the self-

¹¹⁴ *kih kār-i ‘ashiqī kār-ist jānī / zi kufr u dīn birūn-ast ān ma‘ānī*, Hasan Sijzi Dihlavī, *Dīvān-i Hasan Sijzi Dihlavī* (edited by Mas’ūd ‘Ali Mahvī), Hyderabad: Ibrāhīmiyyah Press, 1934, 623 (also cited by Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India c. 1200–1800*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005, 120). The *Favā'id-ul-Fuvād*, which records the discourses over fourteen years (1308–1322) of the patron Sufi saint of Delhi, Niẓām-ud-Din Awliyā, of whom Hasan Sijzī was a close disciple, has been published numerous times: an early edition is Amīr Hasan ‘Alā Sijzī, *Favā'id-ul-Fuvād*, Lucknow: Naval Kishōr, 1885.

¹¹⁵ J. Christoph Bürgel, “Ambiguity: A Study in the Use of Religious Terminology in the Poetry of Hafiz,” in Michael Glünz and J. Christoph Bürgel (editors), *Intoxication, Earthly and Heavenly: Seven Studies on the Poet Hafiz of Shiraz*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1991, 7–39, at 25, see also 31 (some of the verses of Hāfiẓ cited above appear also in this article).

¹¹⁶ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 526.

¹¹⁷ *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, New York: Random House, 197 (2nd edition), 461.

¹¹⁸ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterculture (accessed 10 October 2012).

evident historical *commonplaceness* and *centrality* of the *madhab-i ‘ishq* and of Hāfiẓ-ian literature at the very heart of the mainstream—that is, moving with and as a part of the flow rather than counter to it—of the historical discourses, practices, valorizations and self-constructions of Muslims makes the characterization *counter-religion* highly unsatisfactory, and fails entirely to help us conceptualize the *coherence of contradictory norms* in the lived “religious” reality of Muslims.



Now, it might be argued that literary works of fiction and imagination are an expression not of *Islam*, but of *culture*—at best of “*Islamic culture*”—and thus, unlike works of law or theology or Qur’ānic exegesis, are not to be taken as constitutive elements in conceptualizing *Islam*. This assumed distinction between “*Islam*,” understood reflexively as being something other than (and, somehow, both more than and less than) “*culture*”—usually as “*religion*”—on the one hand, and between “*culture*” on the other hand, is something to which I shall return at greater length later in this book. For the moment, though, it should be borne in mind that even if we somehow designate something as belonging to “*Islamic culture*” rather than to “*Islam*,” we must still determine what the qualifier *Islamic means* in the term “*Islamic culture*,” and how that attribute *Islamic* relates to *Islam*.

This resort to a distinction between the somehow self-evidently distinct categories of “*religion*” and “*culture*” is often invoked in addressing the fifth question: whether there is such a thing as “*Islamic art*,” and if there is, then what is actually Islamic about it? As one art historian has put it: “The problem of where to locate Islamic art . . . is particularly fraught with the qualifying adjective caught between a religious identity and a cultural identification.”¹¹⁹ Thus, the father of the modern study of Islamic art, Oleg Grabar, noted in his entry on “*Islamic Art*” in the leading *Dictionary of Art*: “These arts are almost exclusively secular arts, with the corollary paradox that most of the arts (with the exception of architecture) from a culture defined by its religious identity

¹¹⁹ Finbarr Barry Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New world orders and the end of Islamic art,” in Elizabeth Mansfield (editor), *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, London: Routledge, 2007, 31–53, at 32. See also Wendy M. K. Shaw: “The problematic nomenclature of ‘Islamic art’ has been met with two primary modes of solution, both of which attempt to avoid the problem of ‘Islam’ by redefining terminology: first, the consideration of ‘Islam’ as culture rather than religion; and second, the fragmentation of the category into regional and temporal terms,” Wendy M. K. Shaw, “The Islam in Islamic art history: secularism and public discourse,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012) 19–34, at 3.

have been devoted to the beautification of life rather than to the celebration of the divine.”¹²⁰ Two of the leading historians of Islamic art have written:

What exactly is Islamic art? How well does this category serve the understanding of the material? Does a religiously based classification serve us better than geographic or linguistic ones? . . . While some Islamic art may have been made by Muslims for purposes of faith, much of it was not. A mosque or a copy of the Koran clearly fits everybody’s definition of Islamic art, but what about a twelfth-century Syrian bronze canteen inlaid with Arabic inscriptions and Christian scenes? . . . most scholars accept that the convenient if incorrect term “Islamic” refers not just to the religion of Islam but to the larger culture in which Islam was the dominant—but not sole—religion practiced . . . “Islamic art” is therefore not comparable to such concepts as “Christian” or “Buddhist” art, which are normally understood to refer specifically to religious art . . . In sum then, the term “Islamic” art seems to be *a convenient misnomer* for . . . the visual culture of a place and time when the people (or at least their leaders) espoused a particular religion.¹²¹

But the difficulties with the “convenient misnomer” of “Islamic art” are not limited to the relationship between “religion” and “culture,” but also with the relationship between “unity” and “diversity”:

One of the most harmful ideas developed by historians of Islamic art is the myth of the unity of Islamic art. This idea of unity creates a paradigm for understanding Islamic art that primarily serves to explain similarities between different artistic products. It therefore provides an easy solution for quite intriguing and remarkably specific cases of parallelism in the history of the art of Islam . . . The projected meta-similitude in Islamic art seems to put together different objects . . . thus creating what is often termed “unity in diversity” . . . this stance means that similitude . . . can be explained away very simply on the basis of unity, and other potential reasons for visual similarities are sometimes ignored. Should we not rewrite and critically rethink and discuss the history of unity in Islamic art?¹²²

¹²⁰ Oleg Grabar, “Islamic Art, §I. Introduction. 1. Definition,” in Jane Turner (editor), *The Dictionary of Art*, London: Grove, 1996, 16: 99–101, at 100.

¹²¹ Sheila Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field,” *The Art Bulletin* 85 (2003) 152–184, at 152–153 (italics mine).

¹²² Avinoam Shalem, “What Do We Mean When We Say ‘Islamic Art’? A Plea for a Critical Rewriting of the History of the Arts of Islam,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012) 1–18, at 9.

That the scholarly field that studies this art and that represents it to the global public is uncertain of how to pin down the relation of this art to Islam is nicely illustrated in the fact that, while the custodian of the most important single collection of the art produced in societies of Muslims, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, has an institutional Department of Islamic Art, the Museum has publicly designated its acclaimed “New Galleries of the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia” with an elaborate ethnic, geographical, and temporal circumlocution that omits any mention of the words “Islam” or “Islamic.”

The question of what constitutes Islamic art is an especially vexing one in the case of art-objects such as wine-cups, made for a widespread social practice that is in direct violation of the overwhelming prohibitions of Qur’ān-based Islamic law, or of figural painting produced in evident indifference to sound Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad recorded in the canonical collections of al-Bukhārī (810–870) and Muslim (821–875)—versions of which appear across the major Hadith collections—which are regarded as possessing normative prescriptive authority next only to that of the Qur’ān, and which state categorically and ominously:

The most grievously tormented people amongst the denizens of Hell on the Day of Resurrection will be the makers of images [*al-muṣawwirūn*].¹²³

He who makes an image [*sawwara šuratan*] will be punished by God on the Day of Resurrection until he breathes life into it—which he will not be able to do!¹²⁴

¹²³ *inna min ashadd al-nās ‘adhāban ‘inda Allāh yawma al-qiyāmah al-muṣawwirūn*; 160–161, for this, and other Hadiths in this vein, see Abū al-Husayn Muslim b. Ḥajjāj b. Muslim al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Sahīḥ* (edited by Muḥammad Shukrī b. Ḥasan al-Anqarawī, Ahmad Rif‘at b. Ūthmān Ḥilmī al-Qarahīshārī and Muḥammad ‘Izzat b. Ūthmān al-Zāfarānbūlī), Istanbul: al-Maṭba‘ah al-‘Āmirah, 1334 h [1915], 6:160–162. There is also a report in Shī‘ī Hadith collections of the first Imām, ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib, stating that “Whoever . . . makes a figural image has gone out of Islam [*man . . . maththala mithālan kharaja min al-islām*],” Muḥammad b. al-Hasan al-Hurr al-‘Āmili, *Wasā'il al-shī'ah ilā taħsil masā'il shī'ah* (edited by ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Rabbānī), Tehran: Maktabat al-Islāmiyyah, 1376–1399 h [1956–1978], 3:562.

¹²⁴ *man sawwara šuratan fa-inna Allah mu‘adhdhibu-hu hattā yunfikha fi-hā al-rūh wa laysa bi-nāfikh fī-hā*; Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il b. Ibrāhīm b. Bardizbah al-Ju‘fī al-Bukhārī, *Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Cairo: al-Majlis al-A‘lā li-al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1991, 9:206 (along with several other Hadiths against the making of figural images). Versions of both the above-cited Hadiths appear across the canonical collections: see A. J. Wensinck, J. P. Mensing, W. P. de Haas and J. B. van Loon, *Concordances et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane: Les six livres, le Musnad d’al-Dārimi, le Muwaṭṭa’ de Mālik, le Musnad de Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955, 3:437 (the latter Hadith appears nine times in the *Musnad* of Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, alone). For a Shī‘ī version going back to the Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, see al-Hūrr al-‘Āmili, *Waṣā'il al-Shī'ah*, 3:562–563.

The latter Prophetic imprecation alludes to the text of Qur’ān itself that indicates that God has given (“by My blessing . . . by the Holy Spirit”) to the Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus), among mortals, the power to pass the impossible test that will be imposed upon the image-makers come Doomsday: “O! ‘Isā, son of Maryam . . . when you fashion from clay the form of a bird, by My leave, and you blow into it—it becomes, by My leave, a bird!”¹²⁵ No artist other than Jesus, it would appear, has a wing or a prayer. Are, then, these art objects “Islamic” despite their evident “irreligiosity”—can we speak of an “Islamic wine-cup” or of “Islamic portraiture”? Or are they “secular” objects—in which case are they non-/un-Islamic? Can and should we somehow speak non-oxymoronically of “secular Islamic art” (as so many art historians do)—and if so, by what criteria do we make the distinction?

Setting aside wine-cups for the moment, it will be helpful to look more closely at the exemplary definitional problems that are posed by the question of how to categorize figural painting in relation to or in terms of Islam. The truth-function of the collections of canonical Prophetic Hadith is supposed to be that they establish specific indefeasible norms based upon the authority of Prophetic pronouncements: Hadith authoritatively identify and specify Divine law.¹²⁶ The Prophetic statements on figural representation seem pretty unambiguous in the direness of their implications, leaving very little, if any, interpretive wiggle-room (the word *sūrah*, that is used in the Hadith without any qualification, is the broadest conceptual term in Arabic for “image,” the plain meaning of which covers animate, inanimate, two-dimensional, and three-dimensional figures, made for whatever purpose).

It is thus hardly surprising that Islamic legal discourse has, throughout its history, been overwhelmingly hostile towards figural representation, as is summed up by the eminent Shāfi‘ī jurist and Hadith scholar, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Nawawī (1234–1278), whose accessible short selection of pietistic Hadith, the *Riyād al-ṣalihīn* (*Garden of the Righteous*), is a very widely-printed and -read work in our present day,¹²⁷ and who wrote in his authoritative commentary on the canonical Hadith collection of Muslim b. Hajjāj:

The authorities of our school and others hold that the making of a picture
of any living thing is strictly forbidden and that is one of the great sins

¹²⁵ *yā ‘Isā ibn Maryam . . . ni‘mat-ī ‘alay-ka . . . bi-rūh al-qudusi . . . idh takhluqu min al-tīni ka-hay’ati al-tīri bi-idhn-ī fa-tanfukhu fi-hā fa-takūnu ḫiran bi-idhn-ī*, Qur’ān 5:113 al-Mā’idah.

¹²⁶ For a convenient survey of the Hadiths against figural images, and for some of the legal arguments built thereupon, see Isa Salman, “Islam and Figurative Art,” *Sumer* 25 (1969) 59–96, at 62–87.

¹²⁷ A casual visit to the annual Cairo International Bookfair will confirm this assessment.

because it is specifically threatened with the grievous punishment mentioned in the Hadith . . . the crafting of it is forbidden under every circumstance, because it imitates the creative activity of God . . . This is the summary position of our school on the question, and the absolute majority of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate followers and the succeeding generations of scholars accepted it; it is the view of al-Thawrī, Mālik, Abū Ḥanifah, and others besides them.¹²⁸

In invoking Mālik and Abū Ḥanifah, the eponymous founders of the Mālikī and Ḥanafī *madhhabs*, the Shāfi‘ī al-Nawawī is basically saying that all the legal schools hold the same view. Even when legal scholars have occasionally adopted interpretive devices that delimit the application of the plain meaning of these Prophetic statements in a manner so as to construe them as not requiring outright legal prohibition of figural representation (by distinguishing, for example, between two- and three-dimensional images, or between images of animate and inanimate beings, or between objects and spaces intended for devotion and those for daily use, or between illustrations that depict the shadow of a body and those that do not), these positions are unable to lose the tone of partial qualifications to a larger principle of disapproval, and have hardly been received with an excess of juridical conviction or enthusiasm (the above-cited prohibitory ruling of al-Nawawī, for example, goes on firmly and deliberately to reject these very qualifications).¹²⁹ A thorough analysis of the

¹²⁸ *qāla aṣḥābu-nā wa ghayru-hum min al-‘ulamā’ taṣwīr šūrat al-hayawān ḥarām shadid al-tahrīm wa huwa min al-kabā’ir li-anna-hu mutawa“ad ‘alay-hi bi-hādhā al-wā‘id al-shadid al-madhkūr fi al-ahādīth . . . fa sun‘atū-hu ḥarām bi-kull hāl li-anna fī-hi muḍāhāt li-khalq Allāh ta‘ālā . . . hādhā talkhīṣ madhhabi-nā fi al-mas‘alāh wa bi-ma‘nā-hu qāla jamāhīr al-‘ulamā’ min al-ṣāḥabah wa al-tābi‘īn wa man ba‘da-hum wa huwa madhab al-Thawrī wa Mālik wa Abi Ḥanifah wa ghayri-him; Sharaf al-Din al-Nawawī, *Sharh Saḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim*, on the margins of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qastallānī, *Irshād al-sāri li-sharḥ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Cairo: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Kubrā al-Amīriyyah, 1305 h [1887], 8:398; compare the translation of Thomas W. Arnold, *Painting in Islam: A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1928, 9–10.*

¹²⁹ See Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, 9–10. The deep-rooted negative valorization of figural images in the Hadith literature pervades even such concession to such legal wiggle-room as there might have been, as is conveyed in the conclusion to a detailed study of the *ahādīth* on figural representation: “The Bilderverbot implies that it is forbidden for a Muslim to create, have, use, buy or sell images of living creatures or to be in a place where such images are found. Exceptions to this prohibition are the following: trees, plants and other ‘things’ without ‘rūḥ’ are allowed to be portrayed, this is also the case for things that cannot be considered to be alive any more, like pictures of living things without a head . . . Living creatures can be depicted when it is not possible to respect or venerate the pictures, for example when they appear on carpets, pillows, diwans, etcetera. Sitting, standing or lying on them makes it impossible to respect them . . . Children’s toys in the form of living creatures, like dolls, are allowed. The reason for this is said to be that for girls playing with dolls was considered to be a good preparation for later maternal duties,” Daan van Reenen, “The Bilderverbot, A New Survey,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990) 27–77, at 54. De-

legal opinions towards figural representation, which examines the question in the context of the prolific production of figural painting in Safavid Iran, concludes with the distressing assessment: “All of the above plainly leaves . . . Persianate painters in dire straits. They are still going to be severely punished in the next world.”¹³⁰

Whatever one’s personal attitude to legal opinions, it is a cognitive challenge to conceive of how these authoritative Prophetic pronouncements, taken at face-value, would not intuitively and straightforwardly translate into a larger normative attitude of anti-iconism (or, at least, aniconism). Certainly, the tendency to, at the least, a legal, cultural and moral discomfort with figural images and, at the most, the outright enacted repudiation thereof has been evident in the history of societies of Muslims. This tendency was recently enacted on the world stage in the dramatic destruction of the giant Buddha statues of Bamiyan by the Afghan Taliban¹³¹ (my own first encounter with the same statement of what is/is not Islam/ic took place on a smaller

spite this, there is a peculiar insistence on the part of even the finest historians that the “Islamic prohibition of the image” is “a trope” and that “no such overarching prohibition exists in any foundational Islamic sources,” as says Wendy Shaw, “The Islam in Islamic art history,” 5. Similarly, Oliver Leaman: “The ban on images in Islam does not exist . . . the Qur'an says nothing directly on this issue. There are *ahadith* which are critical of images, in particular images which can be seen as frivolous but this could be taken as a critique of the frivolous as such, not necessarily all images,” Oliver Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, 17. Also David Wasserstein: “One of the most popular misconceptions about medieval Islam . . . is that relating to the reproduction of human images. It is widely supposed, even among those who should know better, that such representation is forbidden . . . It is true, of course, that adoration of images is forbidden, and it is true, too, that, because of their possible use as objects of worship, the production of human or other animate images is censured. But it is important to note that this is not the same thing as prohibition,” David J. Wasserstein, “Coins as Agents of Cultural Definition in Islam,” *Poetics Today* 14 (1992) 303–322, at 303. The severely and categorically anti-iconic *sahih* Hadith cited above appear in the canonical collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim than which there are no “foundational Islamic sources” more “authoritative” save the Qur’ān—and the Qur’ān is understood by all schools of Islamic law to have been explained and qualified by the Hadith. In other words, to the extent that it is possible to have an authoritative statement of prohibition in Islam, these Hadith are prohibitive. It seems to me that such statements by contemporary scholars proceed from their being unable to imagine how Muslims could have invested themselves in the production and consumption of figural imagery *without* this being considered *legally* permissible. The question we need to ask (and to answer) is how despite the prohibition in legal principle Muslims expressed themselves in figural images as a routine practice in their self-expression as Muslims; that is, how they made sense of this as a normative part of their Islam.

¹³⁰ Nomi Heger, “The Status and the Image of the Persianate Artist,” PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1997, 82 (the legal discussion is at 27–82).

¹³¹ On this, see the article by Finbarr Barry Flood that “draws attention to the fact that figuration has been a contested issue even between Muslims” in which there is “negotiation between iconoclasts and iconophiles,” Finbarr Barry Flood, “Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum,” *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002) 641–659.

scale in 1980 at an airport in Saudi Arabia, where I watched customs officers employ a hammer to shatter chess-pieces that had emerged from the suitcase of an unfortunate Pashtun labourer).¹³² Indeed, in view of these canonical Hadith, there would have been no particular reason for us to have been surprised had this attitude to figural images been universal, if there had been no production of figural images in Islamic history, or if such production as there was had been carried out as an underground enterprise in service of an illicit pleasure. What tends to surprise and also to confuse is that this was precisely *not* the case: the historical production of figural images took place under the financial and custodial patronage of the rulers of states and of their associated political and cultural elites as an enterprise in which considerable financial resources were invested, in which artists were held in high social esteem,¹³³ and where miniature paintings were sold as luxury goods in a roaring trade across the Islamic world,¹³⁴ and were also exchanged as tokens of legitimate and legitimating value in diplomatic gift-giving.¹³⁵ The texts which many of these expensively-produced illustrations accompanied were the self-same works of poetry, ethics, morals, and epic that make up the Balkans-to-Bengal literary canon discussed above—one might add to the list the definitive narrative of self-conceptualization of rulership, the *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsī (for which, see Chapter 6) in engagement with the values of whose pre-Islamic legends every ruler in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex constructed his mandate to enact and uphold the order on earth of the God of Islam (the shared value and values invested in the *Shāhnāmah* is well-expressed in the fact that numerous rulers commissioned the production of court copies, and that lavishly illustrated copies were given as diplomatic gifts, such as the famous one given in 1568 by the Shi‘ī Safavid Shah Tahmasp [r. 1533–1576] to the Sunnī Ottoman Sultan Selim [r. 1566–1574]).¹³⁶

A historian of Mughal art notes at one geographical end of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, “The illustrated manuscripts that were a prized possession of the Mughals included eclectic esoteric works like the *Khamsa-i Nizāmī*,

¹³² I vividly recall the customs officer shouting at the labourer that the chess pieces were “statues and idols” [*awthān wa aṣnām*]. I am told that under Saudi law chess sets are prohibited as “games of chance.”

¹³³ See Heger, “The Status and the Image of the Persianate Artist.”

¹³⁴ On the production of illustrated manuscripts in Shiraz for export to the market of Istanbul, see Lâle Uluç, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artists, and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts*, Istanbul: Türkiye Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2006.

¹³⁵ See Lâle Uluç, “Gifted Manuscripts from the Safavids to the Ottomans,” in Linda Komaroff (editor), *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, 144.

¹³⁶ *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: The Persian Book of Kings*, New York City: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.

Dīwān-i Hāfiẓ, Sa‘di’s *Gulistān* and *Būstān*, Jāmī’s *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā*, *Bahāristān* and *Tuhfat al-Ahrār*, *Dīwāns* of Anwari, Amir Khusraw and Amir Shahi, *Akhhlāk-i Nāṣirī* and an illustrated version of the lives of saints, the *Nafahāt al-uns*.¹³⁷ A historian of Ottoman art notes at the other geographical end, “The pasha was an obvious enthusiast of classical Persian literature, which was a taste he shared with most members of the Ottoman court. His illustrated books were all Persian: *Divān* of Navā’i, *Laylī va Majnūn*, *Dīvān* of Amir Khusraw Dīhlavi, Nizāmī’s *Khamsa*, *Shāhnāma*, *Falnāma*, *Dīvān* of Jāmī . . . *Kitāb majālis al-‘ushshāq* (Gatherings of Lovers, biographies of Sufi saints) . . . the *Kulliyāt* of Sa‘di.”¹³⁸ In other words, these figural illustrations were employed throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex precisely as visual expressions of the ideas and values relayed in canonical texts of narrative fiction, poetry, and history that were regarded as the highest registers of self-conceptualization and self-expression in these societies.¹³⁹

This much said, we can now turn to the most instructive element as regards the problematic at hand; which are the *stated terms* in which figural pictorial art was conceived of by the social groups that practiced it. Thus we find that Ṣādiqī Bēg Afshār (1533–1610), the author of a treatise in Persian verse entitled *The Canon of Figural Representation* (*Qānūn-uṣ-Ṣuvar*) and himself an acclaimed portrait-painter, wrote in his autobiographical introduction to this poem about art:

I take the chattels of my ambition to the alleyway of the Figure;
 I aspire to Meaning from the face of the Figure.
 My heart, which had known of the Art of the Figure,
 Brought itself, now, to the high-road of Meaning . . .
 So far have I come in portraying the Figure
 That I have traversed “Figure” and arrived at “Meaning.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Meera Khare, “The Wine-Cup in Mughal Court Culture: From Hedonism to Kingship,” *Medieval History Journal* 8 (2005) 143–188 at 148.

¹³⁸ Emine Fetvaci, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, 52–54 (I have combined titles from the personal libraries of two pashas listed by Fetvaci). See also the ubiquity of these titles, and others of their stripe, in a detailed list of sixteenth-century illustrated manuscripts prepared in Shiraz, mainly for export to the Ottoman market, given in Lale Uluç, “Arts of the Book in Sixteenth Century Shiraz,” PhD dissertation, New York University, 2000, at 380–527.

¹³⁹ On this, see for example, Mehnaz Shayesteh Far, “The Impact of the Religion on the Painting and Inscriptions of the Timurid and the Early Safavid Periods,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 47 (2003) 250–293.

¹⁴⁰ *kasham rakht-e havas dar kū-yi šūrat / shavam ma‘nā-talab az rū-yi šūrat // dilam rā k‘az fann-i šūrat khabar būd / bi-khwud dar rāh-i ma‘nā pay-sipar būd . . . rah-i šūratgarī chandān si-pardam / kih az šūrat bih ma‘nī rāh burdam*; Ṣādiqī Bēg Afshār, *Qānūn-uṣ-Ṣuvar* (edited by Yves

Quite simply, the statement of the author of the *Canon of Figural Representation*—which stands in counter-distinction to the statement of the prescriptive-proscriptive canon of Hadith, and its elaboration as law—is that engagement with figural art is an act of *positive* value: that in the crafting and contemplation of the image the individual may traverse the material limitations of this-worldly materiality and form, and attain to the knowledge of pure higher-worldly *meaning*.

The governing concepts here are clearly those of the hierarchical cosmology of the philosophical-Sufi amalgam outlined above (the parallel with the lines of Jāmī on “Real” and “Metaphorical” love, quoted earlier, is readily evident). The artist-author of these lines of poetry simply *assumes, as a human and historical fact*, that the philosophical-Sufi amalgam in whose language he speaks is both understood by and is operational for his audience—which is the audience of both poetry and of figural painting. The reason for his assumption is obvious: he and his audience share the same human and historical fact: the *Canon of Figural Representation* speaks from and to and within a *norm* that is held by Muslims and that embraces Muslims: a norm where figural representation, far from being anathema, is *truth*.

In case we might assume that the above text is somehow exceptional,¹⁴¹ the commonplaceness of the normative notion of figural art as a source of Truth is readily evident in another, more elaborate, statement of art theory that appears in the foreword to the album of art assembled for the delectation of the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603–1617), which is preserved today in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum in Istanbul.

The raiment and adornment of the finest decorated garments of word and picture, the pearl-ornaments of eloquence and of art, those most chaste of discourses and those most beautiful of images from behind the

Porter), in Yves Porter, *Peinture et Arts du Livre: Essai sur la littérature indo-persane*, Paris: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1992, 198–207, at 198–199 (Porter has followed the edition of Muhammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh, “Qānūn-us-Šuvār,” *Hunar va Mardum* 90 (1349 sh [1970]) 11–20, and has included in his notes the textual variants in the earlier edition, Sādiq Bēk Afshār, *Qānūn-us-šuvār* (edited by ‘Ādil Qāzīyof), Baku: Farhangistān-i ‘Ulūm, 1963 (there is one variant in the quoted lines; namely, *bī-sipar* for *pay-sipar*, which would translate as “My heart, that had known of the Art of Figure / unshielded itself on the High-Road of Meaning”). The translation of these lines by Martin Bernard Dickson (in Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Carey Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, 1:260), though regularly cited by art historians, is very loose indeed.

¹⁴¹ For more invocations of this idea see Yves Porter, “La forme et le sens: à propos du portrait dans la littérature persane classique,” in Christophe Balay, Claire Kappler and Živa Vesel (editors), *Pand-o Sokhan: Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1995, 219–232.

curtain of *No-Doubt* and from the palace of no-imperfection having been bestowed upon the virgin-girls; then, by this beguiling beauty the hearts of the worldly are stolen away and the capacities of the discerning are enamoured and confounded.

Whereas the glowing mirror of the world forever is displaying figures-depicted and images-drawn, and is the object for contemplation by those possessed of insight for instruction, it may yet be rusted by the vicissitudes of time. In such infelicitous days, we turn to our predecessors of yore and of late to view images fitted for contemplation and to narrate accounts express for instruction.

In the disappearing and appearing of the revolving heavens, and in the chameleonic varieties of types of images, such strange effects and marvelous forms present themselves—the imagining and imaging of which serves as occasion for the acquisition of the capital of the science of philosophical-wisdom, and as means for perfecting the refinement of the moral-detecting and -drawing eye. It serves, moreover, certainly and assuredly, to quicken the profound thinking and to edify the illuminating conscience and enlightened heart of the auspicious person of the Emperor of the zenith of ascending degrees.¹⁴²

The introduction to the Sultan’s album is nothing less than an outright celebration of figural representation. Again, one sees arrayed here the epistemological structures of “philosophical religion”—and not in a manner or in a discursive register that is seeking to *argue for* a philosophical or Sufi position, or to *argue against* a juridical one, but rather in a manner and register that forthrightly expresses the *assumed and operational norms* of the educated and self-consciously Muslim elite of the Balkans-to Bengal complex. The source of images in this world is the pure and high domain of “no doubt” and “no-

¹⁴² *öl dürer ve ġurer-i şanayıc ve bedäyi-i seräy-i bī-ayb ve seräperdah-i lä-rayb-deh ölan en-fes-i nefäyiş-i maqälät ve aħsen-i meħasin-i mušavverat benät-i nukātah hilyet-i hulel-i elfaz ve ebsärlah zíver ü zib vīrüb zínet-i dil-farib ileħ qulüb-i cehāniyāni ferifteh ve tab-i ehl-i dilān ālufteh ve aşüpfeħ itmislerdür imdī her bär kih āyineħ-i tab-i mücellā-i rüzgär manzar-i titbär ūlī-yi ebsär dur dāyiman şuretnümā-zi naqsh ü niġar iken havādiś-i rüzgär-i nā-hemvär-dan zenk vāqi olah ānuj gibî eyyām-i nā-fercām-deh bażi suver-i mu'teber ve siyer-i pür-ħiber-i selef ve halef menzür ve mezkür ólıcaq mürür ve zuhür-i gerdiş-i gerdiñ ve envā-i esnāf-i naqş-i būqalamūn ileħ nūmāyān ölan āsār-i ġaribeh ve eṣkål-i ‘acibehnuj taħayyülät ve tašavvurrat bā-is-i taħsil-i sermāyeh-i ‘ilm-i hikmet ve sebeb-i tekmil-i pírayah-i ‘ayn-i ibret oldugħindan mā ‘adā öl zät-i ferħundeh-simāt-i pàdiṣāh-i ‘alī-dereċatħah mūcib-i tenšít-i hāfir-i hāfir ve musteveib-i tatyib-i żemir-i münir ve qalb-i müsteir ölmäq muqarrer ve muħaqqaq dur, Ahmet Süheyl Ünver, “L’album d’Ahmed Ier,” *Annali (Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli)*, n.s. 13 (1963) 127–162, the text is transcribed from the facsimile of folio 3b of MS Topkapı Sarayı, Bağdad Kökü 418, which is reproduced by Ünver at 146 (compare Ünver’s French translation at 140–141).*

imperfection” whence forms Neo-Platonically descend and impregnate with meaning the receptacle “virgin-girls” of this material world. The world in which we live is a “chameleonic” gallery of forms that present themselves “for contemplation” and “instruction.” We make pictures of the forms of this world for the same reason: to attain, by our “imagining and imaging [*tahayullāt ve teşevvurāt*] . . . the capital of the science of philosophical-wisdom, and as means for perfecting the refinement of the moral-detecting and -drawing eye.” Figural art is a means to attain the meanings of the “zenith of ascending degrees.”

The contradiction between this norm and the other norm expressed on behalf of juridical discourse by al-Nawawī on the basis of Hadith appears difficult to reconcile. The puzzle is even further complicated when we discover the “reconciliation” between the two positions that were stated by two eminent *connoisseur* contemporaries of the master-painter, Bihzād of Herat (d. 1535):

So heart-affecting is his depiction of the bird:

That like the bird of Jesus, it has become filled with the
breath-soul-of-life.¹⁴³

By his mastery the hair of his brush

Has given life-soul to inanimate form.¹⁴⁴

By these words, Bihzād’s critics unhesitatingly attribute to him a pneumatic power *like to* the power witnessed by the Qur’ān as having been granted in apparent monopoly by God to Jesus (see above). Now, no such statement (whether read literally or metaphorically) could be made or understood without an awareness on the part of both the authors of these statements and of their audiences of those Hadith that tell us, not only that image-makers *cannot* give life to the work of their hands—but that they will be eternally punished for presuming an undertaking similar to God’s. In other words, figural

¹⁴³ *buvad şūrat-i murgh-i ü dil-pazır / chu murgh-i masihā shudah rūh gır*, Mīr Sayyid Aḥmad, *Muraqqa‘-i Mīr Ghayb Bēg-Dibāchah-‘i Mīr Sayyid Aḥmad*, in Wheeler M. Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, 24–29, at 27; compare Thackston’s translation on the facing page. Compare also the translation of Michael Barry who cites this at the outset of his eye-opening work, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzād of Herāt (1465–1535)*, Paris: Flammarion, 2004, 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Mü-yi qalam-ash az üstādi / jān dādah bih şūrat-i jamādi*, Khwāndamīr, *Muraqqa‘-i ustād Kamāl-ud-Dīn Bihzād: Dibāchah-‘i Ghiyāṣ-ud-Dīn Khwāndamīr*, in Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 41–42, at 41; compare Thackston’s translation at 42; also the translation of Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, at 36.

painting is here being *celebrated* with reference to the very same scriptural texts that legal discourse takes as the criteria for its *proscription*.

Bihzād's painting is thus assigned positive value and larger meaning by invocation of the language of Prophetic Revelation: if we are ignorant of Qur'ān and Hadith we cannot grasp the terms of reference and value and meaning in which Bihzād's audience appreciated him. Here it would appear that the self-same language of the texts of Muhammadian Revelation is read in two hermeneutical trajectories that are so divergent as to produce two contrary values: one trajectory that reads the text to categorically prohibit the image; another that reads the text to celebrate the image. Each respective reading invokes the same body of text but *inverts* the value produced by the other reading—one transforming the negative value of prohibition into the positive value of celebration, and the other *vice versa*. (How) are both of these *Islamic*?



Sixth, and finally, there is the question with which we began this book: that of wine. The consumption of wine made from grapes is prohibited by all schools of Islamic law, which forbid the consumption of intoxicating liquids on the basis of the verse of the Qur'ān, "Wine, and games of chance, and stone-idols, and divining-arrows are an abomination from the works of Satan: shun it, that you might do good works!"¹⁴⁵ further specified by the axiomatic Hadith of the Prophet, "That of which a large amount intoxicates, a small amount is forbidden" (early in their history, the Ḥanafī school of law allowed the consumption of some spirits made from sources other than grape in amounts that fall short of intoxicating the drinker, although by the sixth/thirteenth century, the majority position of that school also became that of blanket prohibition).¹⁴⁶ "The prohibition of wine," as one scholar straightfor-

¹⁴⁵ *yā ayyuhā alladhīnā āmanū innā-mā al-khamru wa al-maysiru wa al-anṣābu wa al-azlāmu rīsun min 'amal al-shayṭāni fa-ijtānibū-hu la'allā-kum tuflīhūna*; Qur'ān 5:92 al-Mā' idah.

¹⁴⁶ See the discussion of the respective positions and arguments of the legal schools on alcoholic beverages by Najam Haider, "Contesting Intoxication: Early Juristic Debates over the Lawfulness of Alcoholic Beverages," *Islamic Law and Society* 20 (2013) 43–89; also Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shī'a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kufa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, at 138–186. For a (spirited) argument that the founder of the Ḥanafī school, the Imām Abū Ḥanifah, permitted the consumption of grape wine in a non-intoxicating measure (and that this view was held by some of the Companions of the Prophet) see the famous dynastic history by the Saljuq vizier, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Sulaymān Rāvandī (fl. 1202), *Rāḥat-us-Sudūr va āyat-us-surūr dar tārīkh-i āl-i Saljūq* (edited by Muḥammad Iqbāl), London: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1921, 417–418.

wardly puts it, “is one of the distinctive marks of the Muslim world; its consequences can hardly be overrated.”¹⁴⁷

However, an equally distinctive mark of the history of Muslims has been a widely-held and constantly reiterated alternative evaluation of wine in non-legal discourses where wine and the consumption thereof are invested with a *positive* meaning expressive of higher, indeed, *rarefied* value—and this positive meaning has been enacted in society both in literary re-iteration and in the physical consumption of wine in social settings. Thus, in a foundational work of medical literature, *The Welfare of Bodies and Souls* (*Kitāb maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus*) of Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (849–943),¹⁴⁸ we find the author stating:

The best drink that humans, through their reason and understanding, have devised a means of producing, is the refined grape-drink among whose properties is that it intoxicates [*al-sharāb al-‘inabī al-raqīq alladhī min ṭab‘i-hi al-iskār*]. It is, of all beverages, the most noble in essence, most superior in composition, and most beneficial—if taken in moderation, and not to excess.¹⁴⁹

Abū Zayd is, of course, speaking of grape-wine.

The benefit of a substance to the body lies in what the substance provides the body by way of health and strength, whereas its benefit to the soul lies in what the substance provides the soul by way of happiness and animation: for these two things—I mean: health and happiness—are the end to which all people strive in this world; and they are not found together in any food or drink save for in this particular drink [*illā fi hādhā al-naw‘ min al-sharāb*].

. . . Its benefit to the soul is the happiness and animation that it provides the soul. This is something unique to it among all foods and drinks,

¹⁴⁷ A. J. Wensinck, “Wine in Islam,” *Muslim World* 18 (1928), 365–373, at 373 (this is a reprinting of the entry on “*Khamr*” in M. H. Houtsma, A. J. Wensinck, T. W. Arnold, W. Heffening, and E. Lévi-Provençal (editors), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: E. Brill, 1927, 4:894–897).

¹⁴⁸ On him see W. Montgomery Watt, “Abū Zayd Balkhī,” in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982–, 1.4:399–400.

¹⁴⁹ *afdal al-ashribah allatī istakhrāja al-nās ṣan‘ata-hā bi-tadbīri-him wa ‘uqūli-him al-sharāb al-‘inabī al-raqīq alladhī min ṭab‘i-hi al-iskār wa huwa ashrafu-hā jawharan wa afdalu-hā tarkibān wa aktharu-hā na‘fān idhā kāna al-tanāwūl bi-qasd wa min ghayr isrāf*. Abū Zayd Ahmad b. Sahl al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus* (edited by Mahmūd Miṣrī), Cairo: Ma‘had al-Makhtūtāt al-‘Arabiyyah, 2005, 416.

for none of these have in them anything of which the pleasure is transported from the body to the soul producing therein—as does this drink—an abundance of happiness, animation, openness, stimulation, self-contentment, generosity, and freedom from cares and sorrows.

Among its virtues is that it acts to produce a marvelous effect within the capacities of the soul by bringing forth from it that which was not seen to be present in it prior to drinking: such as the capacities for courage and magnanimity—which are known to be the noblest of human capacities—this even if these things were lacking in a person before: thus, wine gives courage to the coward and makes generous the miser. It also increases that which is already present in a person: such as the capacities for understanding, memory, intellect, eloquence, and sharpness of thought; for it is known that these virtues increase in a person when he has reached the midway state of drinking—before he is overcome by inebriation.

Further among its virtues is that it is the thing that creates a cause for friends to come together around it in conversation and close company . . . It is known that society is made pleasurable by listening or by conversing . . . and that it is by listening and conversing that companionship and happiness flourish in social gatherings—and that nothing makes listening and conversing so agreeable and pleasurable as partaking in wine. It is wine that provides excellence to society and conversation . . . and there is nothing that makes possible relations of intimacy and confidence between friends so tastefully and pleasantly and effectively as does drinking wine together. In this way one finds that . . . the person dearest to anyone from among all his associates is his boon-companion who drinks with him.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ *manfa'at al-ajsād inna-mā hiya fī-mā yufidu-hā siḥḥatan wa quwwatan wa manfa'at al-anfus inna-mā hiya fī-mā yufidu-hā nishāṭan wa surūran wa hādhāni al-shay'ān a'nī al-ṣīḥḥah wa al-quwwah humā al-ghāyah min maṭālib al-nās fī hādhīhi al-dunyā wa laysa yajtami'āni fī shay'in min al-af'imah wa al-ashribah illā fī hādhā al-naw' min al-sharāb. wa ammā manfa'atū hu li-al-anfus fa-hiya mā yufidu-hā al-surūr wa al-nishāṭ wa dhālikā shay' khāṣṣ la-hu dūna mā siwā-hu min al-af'imah wa al-ashribah li-anna-hu laysa shay' min-hā tata'addā ladhdhatu-hu al-jasad ilā al-nafs fa-yufidu-hā min fart al-surūr wa al-nishāṭ wa al-arihiyyah wa al-ihtizāz wa ghinā al-nafs wa ruhb al-dhirā' wa al-takhallī min al-humūm wa al-ahzān mā yufidu-hā hādhā al-sharāb. wa min tilka al-fadā'il anna-hu yaf'al fī quwā al-nafs af'ālān 'ajibatan bi-iżħāri-hi min-hā mā lā yurā mawjūdan fī-hā qabla shurbi-hi mithlu quwā al-shujā'ah wa al-sakħā' fa-qad 'ulima anna-hā min ashraf quwā al-insān wa in lam yakun al-sharāb min-hu yushajji' al-insān al-jabbān wa yusakkhi al-bakhil wa bi-ziyādati-hi ba'd fī-mā yakün mawjūdan fī-hi min-hā mithlu quwwat al-fahm wa al-hifż wa al-dhihn wa durābat al-lisān wa hiddat al-khwāṭir fa-qad 'ulima anna hādhīhi al-fadā'il tatazayyadu fī-hi idhā balagħa al-hāl al-mutawassitah fī al-shurb wa min qabl ifdā'i-hi ilā al-sukr. wa min tilka al-fadā'il anna-hu al-shay' alladhi ja'ala [reading ja'ala for ju'ila] sababan li-ijtīmā' al-mutahabbīna min al-ikhwān 'alay-hi li-al-muħadathah wa*

Medicine was conceived of in pre-modern societies of Muslims as a register of *hikmah*, or universal wisdom—as (a) *truth*. Medical science is *truth* at which humans arrive, not through the prophetically-revealed text, but through the exercise of rational observation and experimentation—most physicians and natural scientists were thus also philosophers—and *its validity is demonstrated in its curative power* to provide *Welfare for Bodies and Souls*. Abū Zayd al-Balkhī’s evaluation of wine is a truth-claim made by someone practicing the epistemology of what the philosopher-physician Ibn Sīnā, in his great *Law of Medicine* (*al-Qānūn fī al-tibb*) called “the *real sciences* wherein it is *established* that knowledge of a thing is obtained only through knowledge of its causes and original principles—if such are available; and if they are not, then knowledge of it is only effected by way of coming to know its accidental and self-necessary properties.”¹⁵¹

Having adumbrated the accidental and self-necessary properties of wine precisely on the basis of scientific observation, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (who, incidentally, also authored several works on the Qur’ān)¹⁵² then pronounces the universal principle that, in his evaluation and diagnosis, governs wine: the “general rule that applies in regard to everything that is both of great value and of great danger [*hukm muṭṭarrid fī kulli shay' jalil al-qadr 'azīm al-khaṭar*]”—that “it be taken in moderation [*al-tanāwul min-hā 'alā sabīl al-iqtisād*].”¹⁵³ Abū

al-mu'ānasah . . . wa ma'lūm anna al-ijtimā' inna-mā yaṭību bi-samā' aw muḥādathah fa bi-himā ta'muru majālis al-uns wa al-surūr wa humā lā yaṭībāni illā bi-al-sharāb wa 'āmmi-hi fa-al-sharāb huwa alladhi yu'tī faḍīlat al-ijtimā' wa al-muḥādathah . . . wa lā shay' aladhdh wa atyab wa ashadd tamkīnah li-asbāb al-khuṣūṣiyah wa al-mufāwadah bayna al-mutahābbina min al-tanādum . . . wa ka-dhālikā yūjad a'azz al-nās 'alā kullin min al-mutākhīna nadīmu-hu alladhi yushāribu-hu, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus, 416–418. These passages are highlighted and paraphrased by David Waines, “Abū Zayd al-Balkhī on the Nature of Forbidden Drink: A Medieval Islamic Controversy,” in Manuela Marín and David Waines (editors), *La Alimentación en las Culturas Islámicas*, Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 1994, 111–126, at 115–117.

¹⁵¹ *qad tabayyana fi al-'ulūm al-haqīqiyyah anna al-'ilm bi-al-shay' inna-mā yuhṣal min jihat al-'ilm bi-asbābi-hi wa mabādī-hi in kānat la-hu wa in lam takun fa-inna-mā yutammam min jihat al-'ilm bi-'awāridi-hi wa lawāzimi-hi al-dhātiyyah, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī Ibn Sīnā, al-Qānūn fī al-tibb*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-'Āmirah, 1877, 1:4 (compare the translation of O. Cameron Gruner, *A Treatise on the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna, Incorporating a Translation of the First Book*, London: Luzac & Co., 1930, 25–26; and that of Mazhar T. Shah, *The General Principles of Avicenna's Canon of Medicine*, Karachi: Naveed Clinic, 1966, 19). For the place of experimentation in Ibn Sīnā's methodology and epistemology, see Jon McGinnis, “Scientific Methodologies in Medieval Islam,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41 (2003) 307–327, especially at 319–327.

¹⁵² See the list of works by Abū Zayd assembled by Maḥmūd al-Miṣri in his editor's introduction to Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus*, 80–84.

¹⁵³ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus*, 420; see also Waines, “Abū Zayd al-Balkhī on the Nature of Forbidden Drink,” 118.

Zayd's is a value judgement or *hukm* on wine—he uses the same term, *hukm*, as is used for a legal judgement or valorization, and which derives from the same verbal root as does *ḥikmah/hikmat* (the same term, *hakim*, designates both a physician and a philosopher)—as well as a prescription for the social use of wine that is founded on criteria for truth and that arrives at conclusions of truth quite different to the *hukm* of legal discourse that states, “That of which a large amount intoxicates, a small amount is forbidden.” And far from being alone in his evaluation of wine in terms autonomous of those of legal discourse, Abū Zayd is highly representative of the medical discourse: an evaluation of the benefits and harms of wine issued in terms independent of those of legal discourse is, for example, also presented at length in what would become the foundational Persian-language medical text, the *Zakhīrah-i Khwārazmshāhī* by Sayyid Ismā'il b. Ḥasan Jurjānī (1043–1137).¹⁵⁴ Abū Zayd's was also, evidently, a value judgement that was shared by the physician-philosopher, Ibn Sīnā, who—when apparently not engaged in the problem of defining God—routinely drank wine in good company. As Ibn Sīnā's student, Abū ‘Ubayd al-Jūzjānī reports in his biography of his great teacher:

Every night, pupils would gather at his house, while, by turns, I would read from the *Shifā'* and someone else would read from the *Qānūn*. When we were done, various types of singers would appear, a drinking party [*majlis al-sharāb*] was prepared along with its appurtenances, and we would partake of it.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ See the facsimile edition from the manuscript held in the library of the Majlis-i Shūrā of Iran: Sayyid Ismā'il Jurjānī, *Zakhīrah-i Khwārazmshāhī: chāp-i ‘aksi az rū-yi nushkhahā’i khaṭṭi*, (prepared by Sa‘īdī Sirjānī), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Irān, 2535 shāhī [1976], 146–152; and Sayyid Ismā'il Jurjānī, *Zakhīrah-i Khwārazmshāhī* (edited by Muhammād Rizā Muḥarriri), Tehran: Farhangistān-i ‘Ulūm-i Pizishkī, 1382 sh [2003], 3:91–106. The continuing influence of this work may be gauged from the fact that, eight hundred years after it was authored and in the newly emergent age of the printing press, it was commissioned for translation into Urdu by the leading commercial publisher of nineteenth-century North India, Munshi Naval Kishōr of Lucknow, for the benefit of a wider readership (and, presumably, of the Munshi's profits); see Seema Alavi, *Islam and Healing: Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition, 1600–1900*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008, 207–214. On the Naval Kishōr publishing house, see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008.

¹⁵⁵ wa kāna yajtami'u kulla laylatīn fī dāri-hi talabat al-‘ilm wa kuntu aqra' min al-Shifā' nawbatan wa kāna yaqra' ghayr-ī min al-Qānūn nawbatan fa-idhā farighnā haḍara mughannūna ‘alā ikhtilāf tabaqati-him wa ‘ubbiya majlis al-sharāb bi-ālāti-hi wa kunnā nashtaghil bi-hi, see William E. Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974, 54 (compare Gohlman's translation at 55).

It is worth noting, by-the-by, that the works studied prior to these nightly wine-drinking sessions, namely Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'* and his *Qānūn*, would become the most influential books, respectively, of physics and metaphysics, and of medicine, in the subsequent centuries of the history of societies of Muslims.

The *positive* valorization of wine is, of course, universally evident in the history of the poetical discourses of Muslim societies—that is, in the form of speech regarded as the highest register of human self-expression and social communication—where wine served as the pre-eminent and pivotal image for the deepest experience of the meaning of human existence in relation to the Divine. When seeking to make sense of the contradictory valorization of wine in literary and legal discourses, respectively, the tendency on the part of modern analysts is to insist on understanding the image of wine in the literary discourse of the Islamic world in purely metaphorical terms. Unaccountably, this tendency ignores the widespread practice of grape-wine-drinking as a persistent and standard feature in the history of societies of Muslims (as mentioned above by al-Balkhī, and as practiced by Ibn Sīnā and his students) in which the ideal setting for wine was in a gathering of friends with the accompaniment of poetry and music. The consumption of grape-wine took place in social gatherings un-embarrassedly and frankly designated in the various languages of Islamic civilization as “drinking assemblies” (Arabic: *majlis al-sharāb*, Persian: *majlis-i sharāb*, Turkish: *bādeh meclisi*, *çāğır meclisi*, etc)—and in which partakers were certainly not all drinking on doctor’s orders.

Given the fact that Muslims did not merely spout poetry about wine but consumed wine and poetry together in the same social gatherings as a part of the same body-and-soul-nourishing repast, it is hardly reasonable to wish the wine-poetry away as mere symbolism divorced from material reality. Wine-drinking was a *collective and normative group practice*—which is to say, it was practiced in often large social gatherings of friends and peers; neither furtively and secretly on the one hand, nor in the common and general public on the other—it is hardly reasonable, then, to conceive of its practitioners to have considered it a categorical and unmitigated violation of the Divine Truth of the God in acknowledgement of whose existence they lived. Qur’ānically-prohibited wine was not only the most rarefied *metaphorical* drink of Muslims; it was also the most rarefied *social* drink of Muslims.¹⁵⁶ Is this conceivably “Islamic”?¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ On the culture of the consumption of wine in social gatherings at court and in private parties, see now the rich and richly-illustrated study by Halil İnalçık, *Has-bağcēde ‘ayş u tarab: nedimler, şairler, mutribler*, İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ It cannot be overemphasized that one is referring here to not just alcoholic beverages

The most influential—that is, most widely copied, read and re-worked—book of political theory and “practical philosophy” (*hikmat-i ‘amali*) in Islamic history until the modern period, the *Ethics* (*Akhlaq*) of the philosopher, astronomer and statesman, Naṣir-ud-Din Ṭūsī (d. 1274), which circulated widely, enjoying paradigmatic status as a book of social norms and ideals throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (it is cited above in the list of standard illustrated books), contains a chapter expressly dedicated to the “Manners of Wine-Drinking [*ādāb-i sharāb-khwurdan*],” indicating the *normalness* of the practice. Ṭūsī’s bottom line is: a gentleman may drink, but should never be blotto.

When one enters a wine gathering . . . in no case may one stay so long as to become drunk . . . if a man have a poor head for wine, he should drink little, or he should dilute it, or he should leave the party earlier . . . Let him not become involved in the conversation of drunken men or busy himself in mediation between them; however, where matters eventuate in hostility, he should restrain them from (attacking) each other . . . Should a malaise overcome him, let him fight it off in the midst of the assembly in such a way that his companions do not become aware thereof, or let him go outside without delay; once he has vomited, he may return to the party.¹⁵⁸

Ṭūsī is here not telling Muslims *not* to drink; rather, he is telling them, as a practical and social matter, the *right way* to drink.

That there was an *ethic* (as in the title of Ṭūsī’s work) attached to drinking, and that the drinking of wine constituted an element within a larger articulated and integrated world-view and ethos of Muslim existence is precisely what is expressed in the poetry of Hāfiẓ, discussed above. And any doubts that the poetry of Hāfiẓ was understood by its audience to refer as much to physical wine as to metaphysical/metaphorical wine may be removed summarily by admitting into exhibitory evidence a representative wine-jug (there

made from sources other than grape and date which were permitted in a minority view within the Hanafi legal school followed by the Sunni Turkic peoples, but precisely to grape-wine, the prohibition of which was unambiguous in legal discourse.

¹⁵⁸ I have slightly emended the translation of Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 176–177; *chun dar majlis-i sharāb shavad . . . bā-yad kih bih hich hāl chandān muqām nakunad kih mast gar-dad . . . pas agar ẓā’if-sharāb buvad andak khwurad yā mamzūj kunad yā az majlis sabuktar barkhizad . . . va dar ḥadīṣ-i mastān khūz nakunad va bih tavassut-i išhān mashghūl nashavad magar kih bih khuṣūmat anjāmad āngāh išhān rā az yak-dīgar bāzdārad . . . va agar ghasayān ghalabah kunad dar miyān-i majlis ān rā mudāfa’at kunad bar vajhī kih aşhāb vuqūf nayābānd yā dar hāl bīrūn īyad va chun qayy kunad bā majlis mu’āvadat nanumāyad; Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣīrī*,*

234–235.

are several others) made in Herat in 1461/62 inscribed with the following *ghazal* from the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ:

Better than pleasure, than the conversation of friends, than the garden
and Springtime:
What is there?

Where is the wine-bearer? Tell: Why are we waiting? What is there?
Every moment of joy that comes in hand: take as a gift!

No one has knowledge: at the end of this work: What is there?
Life is tied by a hair-thread: Take heed!

Tend your own sorrows! As for the sorrows of the world: What is
there?

The meaning of the Water of Life and the Garden of Iram:

Save for the bank of a brook and agreeable wine: What is there?

The abstinent and the drunkard are both of the one tribe:

If we give our heart: to whose charms? What choice! What is there?
What does this silent firmament know of the secret beyond the veil?

O, claimant! You quarrel with the curtain-keeper: What is there?
If the cruelty and infidelity of the beloved are not taken into the
reckoning:

What means the Grace and Mercy of God? What is there?

The ascetic desired drink from the Fountain of Paradise, and Hāfiẓ from
the wine-cup;

God's Will 'twixt the two? We shall see what is there.¹⁵⁹

This wine-jug (preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London) dates from the reign in Herat of Sultan Husayn Mīrzā Bāyqarā (*r.* 1470–1506)—patron of a magnificent cultural efflorescence which included the above-mentioned philosopher, poet and Sufi, Jāmī (the great elaborator in Persian of

¹⁵⁹ *khwush-tar zi 'aysh u şuhbat u bâgh u bahâr chîst / sâqî kujâst gû sabab-i intîzâr chîst // har vaqt-i khwush kih dast dahad mughtanam shumâr / kas râ vuqûf nîst kih anjâm-i kâr chîst // payvand-i 'umr bastah bih mû'ist hûsh dâr / ghamkhwâr-i khwîsh bâsh gham-i rûzgâr chîst // ma'nî-yi âb-e zindâgi u rawzâh-yi Iram / juz ȳarf-i jûybâr u may-i khwushgavâr chîst // mastûr u mast har du chu az yak qabilah-and / mâ dil bih 'ishva-yi kih dahîm ikhtiyâr chîst // râz-e darûn-e pardah chih dânad falak khamûsh / ay muddaî nizâ-i tu bâ pardahdâr chîst // sahv u khatâ-yi bandah garash hast i'tibâr / ma'nî-yi luif u rahmat-i parvardîgâr chîst // zâhid sharâb-i kawsar u Hâfiẓ piyâlah khwâst / tâ dar miyânah khwâstah-yi kirdîgâr chîst; Hâfiẓ, *Divân-i Hâfiẓ*, ghazal 66. The inscription was first transcribed and identified by Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World: 8th-18th Centuries*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982, 248–250 (item number 109); it was re-read by Linda Komaroff, *The Golden Disk of Heaven: Metalwork of Timurid Iran*, Cosa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1992, 156–158.*

the thought of Ibn ‘Arabi), and also of the above-mentioned Jesus-like painter, Bihzād—who acquired the status of a model prince in the historical imagination of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, and of whom the Mughal Emperor, Bābur, wrote in his autobiography, “For the nearly forty years that he was King in Khurasan, there was not a day when he did not drink wine after performing the noon-day prayer—but that he never drank a morning draught—as was also the state of affairs with his sons, and all his military and civilian officials”¹⁶⁰ (Husayn Bāyqarā seems, in this matter, to have been one step ahead of the eleventh-century Ziyārid ruler of northern Iran, Kaykāvūs b. Iskandar who, in his mirror-for-princes, the *Qābūsnāmah*, advised, “Begin your drinking after the mid-afternoon prayers”).¹⁶¹ The inscribed verses of Hāfiẓ present a moral, intellectual, and existential valorization of wine where a positive value is articulated for wine by conscious means of a dialectical invocation of elements of the textual world of Muhammadan Revelation: “the secret beyond the veil” (*Qur’ān* 42:51 al-Shūrā tells us that God speaks to man *min warā’-i hijābin*, “from behind a veil”), “the Fountain of Paradise” (an engagement with *Qur’ān* 108:1 al-Kawthar),¹⁶² “the garden of Iram” (an invocation of *Qur’ān* 89:6 al-Fajr),¹⁶³ and the *Qur’ānically* ubiquitous “Grace and

¹⁶⁰ *Qirq yılga yavuq kim Xurāsānda pādiśāh edi, heč kün yoq edi kim namāz-i peşindin song ičmägäy, vali hargiz şabūhī qulmas edi. Oğlanları va jamī’ sipāhiğa va şahrişa bu häl edi.* [Persian: *nazdik bi-chihil sâl kih dar Khorāsān pādishâh bûd hîch rûz nabûd kih ba’d az namâz-i pîshn sharâb nakhwurd ammâ hargiz şabûhî namikardah. Pisarân-i ü va jamî’ sipâhî va shahri-yi ü râ in häl bûd*]; Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur Mirza, *Bâburnâma* (*Chaghatai Turkish Text with Abdul-Rahim KhanKhanan’s Persian Translation* (Turkish transcription, Persian edition and English translation by Wheeler M. Thackston Jr.), Cambridge: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1993, 2:340–341 (I have reproduced Thackston’s transliteration of the Chaghatai Turkish; compare Thackston’s translation).

¹⁶¹ *ammâ ḍighāz-e sîkî-khwurdan namâz-i dîgar kun;* Kaykāvūs b. Iskandar b. Qâbûs b. Washnîr b. Ziyâr, *Qâbûsnâmah* (edited by Sa’id Nafisi), Tehran: Matba’-i Majlis, 1313 sh [1934], 48; compare the translation in Kai Kâ’üs ibn Iskandar, *Prince of Gurgân, A Mirror for Princes: The Qâbûs Nâma* (translated by Reuben Levy), London: Cresset Press, 1951, 59. On the manners of wine-drinking, see also the famous work of the Saljuq vizier and founder of the great Nîzâmiyyah madrasah in Baghdad where al-Ghazzâlî taught, Nîzâm-ul-Mulk, *Siyâsatnâmah*, Tehran: Kitâbfurûsh-i Tahûrî, 1334 sh [1955], 128–129 (translated as *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyâsat-nâma or Siyar al-Mulûk of Nîzâm-ul-Mulk* (translated by Hubert Drake), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960, 122–123); as well that of his successor, Râvandi, *Râhat-uş-Sudûr*, 416–427.

¹⁶² The word I am translating as “fountain of paradise” is, of course, *kawsar* (Arabic: *al-kawthar*), which is named in the *Qur’ān* as something granted to Muhammad by God (*Qur’ān* 108:1 al-Kawthar), and is identified in Hadith as either a fountain, pool, cistern or river in Paradise; see J. Horovitz and L. Gardet, “*Kawthar*” in E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and Ch. Pellat (editors), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition). Volume IV, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978, 4:805–806.

¹⁶³ “Iram of the Pillars [*iram dhât al-‘imâd*]” is invoked in *Qur’ān* 89:6 al-Fajr as a corrupt people who were destroyed by God. It became widely accepted that these people lived in the city of Iram, which was famous for its magnificent gardens. The phrase “garden of Iram” became

Mercy of God.” The present *ghazal* ends with the statement that it remains to be seen in favour of whom/what it is that God will ultimately rule: will it be Hāfiẓ and wine, or the ascetic and abstinence, or neither, or both (God might well finally say, “If we give our heart—to whose charms? What choice! What is there?”)? This wine-jar—similar to other (surviving) objects like it made by and for the use of Muslims¹⁶⁴—is self-evidently a reification of the place of wine in a larger inter-articulated aesthetical and ethical sensibility that has *meaning* only with reference to the Revelatory sources of Islam, as well as an instrument of the fact of the practice of the consumption of wine in a social milieu conscious of (we might say: *inscribed with*) this complex of values.¹⁶⁵ Is this complex of values and practices and the object that embodies and bears witness to them *Islamic*?

The consumption of wine was, thus, like the production of figural painting discussed above, prohibited in legal discourse, but positively valued in non-legal discourse—especially amongst those social and political elites who instituted and secured the structures of the state and the very legal institutions that regulated society. Thus, the Mughal Emperor, Bābur, writes disarmingly in his autobiography about his life-long struggle with the bottle,¹⁶⁶ the diplomatic gifts of the Ṣafavid Shāh ‘Abbās to the Great Mughal Jahāngīr included a choice selection of wine,¹⁶⁷ and the Ottoman Sultan İbrāhīm, remembered as

standard in Persian, Ottoman and Urdu poetry. It is worth noting that the city in which Hāfiẓ lived and wrote, Shiraz, itself has to this day a famous garden, built in the eighteenth century, called “The Garden of Iram” (*Bāgh-i Iram*).

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, the sixteenth-century wine-cup preserved in the Freer Gallery in Washington, DC (object number F 1954.115), inscribed with similar verses from another of Hāfiẓ’s *ghazals*:

We and wine—and the pious ascetics:
Let us see to whom the beloved turns.

mā vu may u zāhidān-i taqvā / tā yār sar-i kudām dārad; Hāfiẓ, *Dīvān-e Hāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 115; also items 165 and 167 in Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World*, 350–353. For the larger engagement with Hāfiẓ in the pictorial and plastic arts, see the important article by Priscilla Soucek, “Interpreting the *ghazals* of Hafiz,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (2003) 146–163.

¹⁶⁵ For a strictly metaphysical and symbolic reading of this *ghazal* that makes no reference to its appearance on a wine-jug, but rather scoffs at the possibility that it might legitimately be taken as referring to physical wine—“naively literalist (if not forthrightly stupid) readers might well read this . . . as though the poet were actually speaking of this particular outward wine and stream of Shirāz—rather than of that Wine and Stream and spiritual Conversation of ever-renewed Creation”—see James Morris, “Transfiguring Love: Perspective Shifts and the Contextualization of Experience in the *Ghazals* of Hāfiẓ,” in Leonard Lewisohn (editor), *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2010, 227–250, at 242.

¹⁶⁶ On this famous characteristic, see Anna Malecka, “The Muslim Bon Vivant: Drinking Customs of Bābur, the Emperor of Hindustan,” *Der Islam* 78 (2001) 310–327.

¹⁶⁷ Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 67.

Sarhōsh (“the Drunk”), was popularly reputed to have undertaken the conquest of vine-rich Cyprus for the express purpose of lubricating his habit. Bābur noted further of his royal cousin, Bāysongūr, whom he recognized as a “just, humane, fine-natured prince of learned-virtue,” that “he was excessively fond of wine; when not drinking, he would perform his prayers.”¹⁶⁸

The remarkable Ottoman traveler, Evliyā Çelebī, describes his first encounter with the Ottoman Sultan Murād IV as having taken place at a royal party where wine was consumed (Evliyā himself abstained), terminated by the mid-afternoon prayer, followed by a recitation from the Qur’ān.¹⁶⁹ What Rudi Matthee has written about Safavid Iran applies throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex: “Wine . . . presents us with the fundamental paradox of a substance that, although formally forbidden, played an important role in society, its rituals, and its conventions.”¹⁷⁰

It is in this broader historical context of the *normalcy* of wine-consumption to the life-ways of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex that I should like to turn to three physical objects that are most instructive in helping us to diagnose the *mutually-constitutive* relationship between wine and Islam in history. These are three inscribed wine-vessels that belonged to the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr: a grey jade wine-cup made for Jahāngīr in 1607/08, a green jade wine-cup made for him in 1613/14, and a white jade wine-jug that Jahāngīr acquired the same year and that had once belonged to another great imbibier, the Timurid astronomer-mathematician-Sultan Uluğ Beg (1394–1449, whose great observatory and madrasah still stand in Samarqand, and whose father, Shāh Rukh, was a stern teetotaler).

The first of these objects, preserved today in the Brooklyn Museum in New York, bears on its lip the unambiguous identifying legend “The wine-cup [*jām-i may*] of the King of the Age, *Anno Secundo*,” and is blazoned with the following inscription:

By order of His-Presence-Most-High, the Great *Khāqān*, Master of the Kings of the World, Manifestation of Divine Favours, Pearl-on-the-Stairway of Caliphal Succession and Emperorship, Sun-in-the-Firmament of Sultanate and World-Government, Moon-in-the-Heavens of Justice

¹⁶⁸ ‘adālatpeşa u ādamī u xuştab‘ u fadilatlıg pādişāhzāda edi . . . xaylî çagırğa hirşı bar erdi çagır içmas mahallda namāz ötar edi [Persian: ‘adālatpişah va ādamī va khwushṭab‘ va bā-fazılat pādishāhzādah büd . . . khaylî bih sharāb hirş dāshtah dar vaqtı kih sharāb namīkhwurdah namāz mīguzārdah]], Babur, *Bâburnâma*, 140–141 (I have reproduced Thackston’s transliteration of the Chaghatay Turkish; compare Thackston’s translation).

¹⁶⁹ Robert Dankoff (with an afterword by Gottfried Hagen), *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, 35–41.

¹⁷⁰ Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 67.

and Felicity, Abū-l-Muẓaffar, the Shāh, son of Akbar, the Shāh, Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr Muḥammad, the Emperor, Muslim-Warrior.¹⁷¹

The inscription on the green-jade wine-cup of 1613/14 (preserved today in the Victoria and Albert Museum) reads:

By the World-Seizing [=Jahāngīr] Emperor the world found order;
From the radiance of his justice the age was filled with light;
From the reflection of the spinel-coloured wine, may
The jasper-wine-cup be—forever—like a ruby!¹⁷²

The inscription that Jahāngīr had carved into the lip of the wine-jar that had once belonged to Uluğ Bēg (preserved today in the Gulbenkian collection in Lisbon, see Figure 1), reads:

God is Most Great [*Allāhu Akbar!*] The King of the Seven Lands! The Emperor of Emperors who spreads Justice! The Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical! Abū-l-Muẓaffar Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr, the King, son of Akbar, the King! Righteous-Warrior!¹⁷³

To the limited extent that wine-cups are read as objects related to rulership in Islamic history¹⁷⁴ the tendency is to understand them as merely literary

¹⁷¹ *jām-i may-i pādīshāh-i dawrān sanah-i iṣnayn . . . bi-farmūdah-i a'lāhażrat khāqān-i mu'azzam mālik-i mulük-i 'ālam mazhar-i alṭāf-i ilāhi durr-i daraj-i khilāfat va pādīshāhī mihr-i sipihr-i sultānat va jahānbāni māh-i āsmān-i mu'addalat va kāmrāni Abū-l-Muẓaffar pādīshāh ibn-i Akbar pādīshāh Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr Muḥammad pādīshāh ghāzi*; the inscription was transcribed by A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, “Sa‘ida-ye Gilānī and the Iranian Style Jades of Hindustan,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, n.s. 13 (1999) 83–140, at 92. I am reading *durr-i daraj* for the more rhetorically conventional *durr-i durj*, thus taking the phrase to mean “Pearl-on-the-Stairway of Caliphal Succession and Emperorship” rather than “Pearl-in-the-Casket of Caliphal Succession and Emperorship”; this on the basis that the image of the stairway conveys the idea of succession—in particular, each of the stairs of the *minbar* in a mosque symbolizes the seat of a succeeding Caliph (compare Melikian-Chirvani’s translation).

¹⁷² *az shāh-i jahān-gīr jahān yāft nizām / pur nūr shud az partaw-i 'adlash ayyām / az 'aks-i sharāb-i la'l-rangash bādā / yāqūt āsā piyālah-i yashm mudām*; the inscription was transcribed by Melikian-Chirvani, “Sa‘ida-ye Gilānī and the Iranian Style Jades of Hindustan,” 96 (I have very slightly amended Melikian-Chirvani’s translation).

¹⁷³ *Allāhu Akbar pādīshāh-i haft kishvar shāhanshāh-i 'adālat-gustār vāqif-i rumūz-i haqīqī wa majāzi Abū-l-Muẓaffar Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr pādīshāh ibn-i Akbar pādīshāh ghāzi sanah-i 8 julūs muṭābiq-i sanah-i 1022 hijrī* [In the year 8 regnant, correspondent to the year 1022 hijrī]. The inscription was transcribed by Melikian-Chirvani, “Sa‘ida-ye Gilānī and the Iranian Style Jades of Hindustan,” 107 (I have slightly amended Melikian-Chirvani’s transcription, and have duly re-translated the text, correcting Melikian-Chirvani’s significant mistranslation of *vāqif* from “mortmain donor” to “knower”).

¹⁷⁴ The wine-cups of the Mughal emperors have, to the best of my knowledge, never been studied as statements of self-conceptualization of rulership.



FIGURE 1. White jade wine-jug produced in Samarkand for the Timurid astronomer-mathematician-Sultan Uluğ Beg (1394–1446), acquired in 1613 by the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr, bearing the inscription on the lip: “God is Most Great [Allāhu Akbar!] The King of the Seven Lands! The Emperor of Emperors who spreads Justice! The Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical! Abū-l-Muẓaffar Nūr-ud-Din Jahāngīr, the King, son of Akbar, the King! Muslim-Warrior!” (Courtesy, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon).

gestures towards the pre-Islamic image of the world-divining wine-cup of Kay-Khusraw, the mythic Iranian King commemorated in the *Šāhnāmāh*, which also came to be associated with another mythic Iranian king, Jamshīd (remembered as the first wine-maker), as the *jām-i jām*.¹⁷⁵ The texts inscribed on the wine-cups of Jahāngīr, however, go well beyond this pre-Islamic value to articulate a conception of *legitimate rulership in a distinctively Islamic hermeneutic*—a statement of legitimate rulership, it should be added, which is here being made by the political and social order that ruled over a larger population of Muslims than any other on the planet. It is striking that the third inscription begins with the fundamental Islamic declaration, *Allāhu*

¹⁷⁵ See Mahmoud Omidsalar, “Jamšid. ii. Jamšid in Persian Literature,” in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982–, 14.5:522–528.

Akbar (God is Most Great!); the same glorification of God also appears four times on another wine-vessel made for Jahāngīr in 1618/19.¹⁷⁶

Thus, the wine-vessels of the Great Mughal declare categorically his fealty to the God of Islam. The wine-cup of 1607/8 expressly links Jahāngīr's rule to the *khilāfat*, or Vicegerency—that is, at the very least, to the Caliphal Succession to the Prophet Muḥammad, if not to the Vicegerency on Earth to God Himself.¹⁷⁷ Two of the objects characterize Jahāngīr as *ghāzi*—as a warrior who fights for the community of Muslims and is ready to lay down his life in the way of Islam (for which reason I have rendered the word as “Muslim-Warrior”—a self-designation that invariably appears on the coins minted by the Mughal emperors. The primary terms in which the Emperor is constituted and presented are by the fulfillment of the political function of giver of Justice and Order—which are, significantly, the qualities emphasized and reiterated as definitive of legitimate Rulership by Ṭūsī in his *Ethics*, the book that the historian, Muzaffar Alam, has shown to have been the foundational text for Mughal political thought.¹⁷⁸

These defining attributes of the Emperor in the world are likened by the inscription on the Victoria and Albert Museum wine-cup to the attribute of wine in the cup: just as the world finds order and is illuminated by the justice of the Emperor—the Successor of the Prophet—so is the wine-cup illuminated by the radiance of wine. The Emperor is wine, and he is also the Caliph and Ghazi. Deeply evident in these inscriptions is the language of the epistemological apparatus of the philosophical-Sufi amalgam: thus, the Emperor is, in clear Sufi terms, the *manifestation* (*mazhar*: literally, the “locus of making visible”) of Divine favour; also, in clear Suhrawardīan idiom, his justice *illuminates* the world. Above all, he is the “Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical,” that is of the signs of *haqīqah* and *majāz*: he is, in other words, knower of the hierarchical registers of higher and lower T/truth posited by Sufi and philosophical thought (this is a standard conceptualization and representation of Mughal political discourse: for example Jahāngīr’s grandfather, the Mughal Emperor Humāyūn, was entitled “Unifier of the Sovereignty of the Real-True and of the Metaphorical [*jāmi-i ṣalṭanat-i haqīqī va majāzī*]”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Melikian-Chirvani, “Sa‘ida-ye Gilāni and the Iranian Style Jades of Hindustan,” 104.

¹⁷⁷ On the concept of *khilāfah* as Vicegerency of God, see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 4–23.

¹⁷⁸ Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 46–69.

¹⁷⁹ See Said Amir Arjomand, “Legitimacy and Political Organization,” in Robert Irwin (editor), *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 4, Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 225–273, at 269–270. For another instance of Jahāngīr portraying himself as “By the Grace of God, Emperor of Form and Meaning [*pādishāh-i śūrat o mānā*]” see the inscription in the upper panels in the famous min-

The economy with which the wine-vessels of Jahāngīr invoke, condense and reify a complex language of conceptualization of meaning of existence and of political order can only be read as eloquent testimony of the profound and reflexive degree to which the consciousness of the people in the society in which these statements were made must itself have been inscribed with and cognizant of this complex of meaning. The language of the wine-vessels is, in other words, both commonplace and *normative*. Indeed, it would appear that the wine-vessels of the Mughal Emperor are *Islamic* wine-vessels in that they inscribe themselves with a *meaning* that is constructed and expressed squarely in terms of and by relation to referents and values that issue blatantly from Islamic hermeneutics—that is, hermeneutics addressed to the meaning of the Muhammadan Revelation. And in inscribing themselves with Islam, these objects also *inscribe* Islam: that is, by saying “*we are meaningful in terms of Islam*”—or “*we are Islamically meaningful*”—the wine-vessels, in turn, stake a claim to constructing the meaning of Islam.

Further illustrative of this dynamic is the fact that Jahāngīr minted several coins bearing an image of him holding a wine-cup (see Figure 2).¹⁸⁰ In this image, Jahāngīr holds a book in his other hand—one can only wonder which book! Historically, there are two definitive public actions by which a ruler demonstrates the legitimate fact of his rule to his Muslim subjects: one, the sermon at the Friday congregational prayers is read in the name of the legitimate ruler; and, two, the coin of the realm—which is the currency for legal transaction—is minted in the name of the legitimate ruler. Jahāngīr’s gold sovereign (another surviving example of which is the illustration that appears on the dust jacket of this book) thus publicly and *statedly* posits his wine-cup at the semantic and symbolic center and apex of Islamic political order. Clearly, for Jahāngīr, his wine-cup cohered with his conceptualization of what is Islam: *does our own conceptualization of Islam allow us to understand this coherence?*¹⁸¹



In addressing the question of how to conceptualize Islam as a unity in light of diversity, the purpose of raising and elaborating the foregoing six exemplary

iature painting known as “Jahāngīr Preferring a Shaykh to Kings,” (Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C, F42.15), http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.cfm?q=fsg_F1942.15a.

¹⁸⁰ For other examples of such coins, see Andrew V. Liddle, *Coins of Jahangir: Creations of a Numismatist*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2013, 61–63.

¹⁸¹ As Wilfred Cantwell Smith noted, “It is what the Hindu is able to see, by being a Hindu, that is significant. Until we can see it too, we have not come to grips with the religious quality of his life,” Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 138.



FIGURE 2. Gold coin struck by the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr in 1611 (1020 *hijrī*) to commemorate the sixth year of his accession. Jahāngīr is depicted holding a wine cup in one hand, and a book in the other (©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

questions has been threefold. First, to demonstrate to the reader that in relation to Islam, we are actually talking not so much about conceptualizing unity in the face of diversity, but rather about conceptualizing unity in the face of *outright contradiction*. As such, keen diagnostic attention needs to be paid to the *prolific scale and definitive import of the phenomenon of internal contradiction to the constitution of the human and historical phenomenon of Islam*. Of course, I am not suggesting that other human and historical phenomena are not characterized by contradiction; indeed, attending to contradiction in conceptualizing Islam might prove instructive for the study of other phenomena that display contradiction on a similar or lesser scale.

Second, it has been to re-orient the historical consciousness of the reader to awareness of the fact that these contradictory claims by Muslims about the normative constitution of Islam were claims made, not on the social and political and intellectual margins of the Muslims' discourses about Islam, but

rather at the very social and political and intellectual center of Muslims' discourses about Islam—and that, as such, they cannot be accounted for by the reflexive insistence that some of these discursive claims (such as law) somehow possess an inherently greater agency of normativity in constituting Islam than do others (such as the Sufi-philosophical amalgam).

Third, it has been to plant the seed in the mind of the reader that these contradictions cannot meaningfully be understood, as they generally are, by separating them out as differences between the *religious* and *cultural* (or *religious* and *secular*) spheres of something called Islam, with integral Islam obtaining in a somehow self-evidently “religious” space—after all, is the wine-cup of Jahāngīr a religious, a cultural or a secular object? Rather, I suggest that these contradictions call for—indeed, demand and require—a suspension of these received categories of distinction in order to reconceptualize Islam as a human and historical phenomenon in *new* terms which map meaningfully onto the import of the prolific scale and nature of the *contradictory normative claims* made in history by Muslims about *what is Islam*.



I should like to emphasize that the examples presented in the six foregoing questions are not trivial or marginal: rather, they highlight historical phenomena that have been, for long periods of history, especially central to and definitively characteristic of a vast temporal, geographical and demographic swathe of societies of real Muslim people. Exemplarily, all of the ideas, values and behaviours listed above were, in the rough period 1350–1850, endemic to the societies living in the vast region extending from the Balkans through Anatolia, Iran and Central Asia down and across Afghanistan and North India to the Bay of Bengal. It has long been recognized that the societies of the geographical, temporal and demographic space that I have been calling the *Balkans-to-Bengal complex* (see Figure 3), in spite of local variations in language and ethnicity and creed, comprised a relatively distinct and integrated world (sometimes termed a “civilization,” or a “cultural zone” within Islamic civilization). For example, Robert Canfield has noted:

Across the territories of Western, Central and South Asia there was a remarkable similarity in culture, particularly among elite classes. The wealthy and powerful of the empires affected similar manners and customs, wore similar styles of dress, and enjoyed much the same literature and graphic arts. In building their palaces, mosques, and mausoleums, rulers competed for the services of the same great artisans, artists and

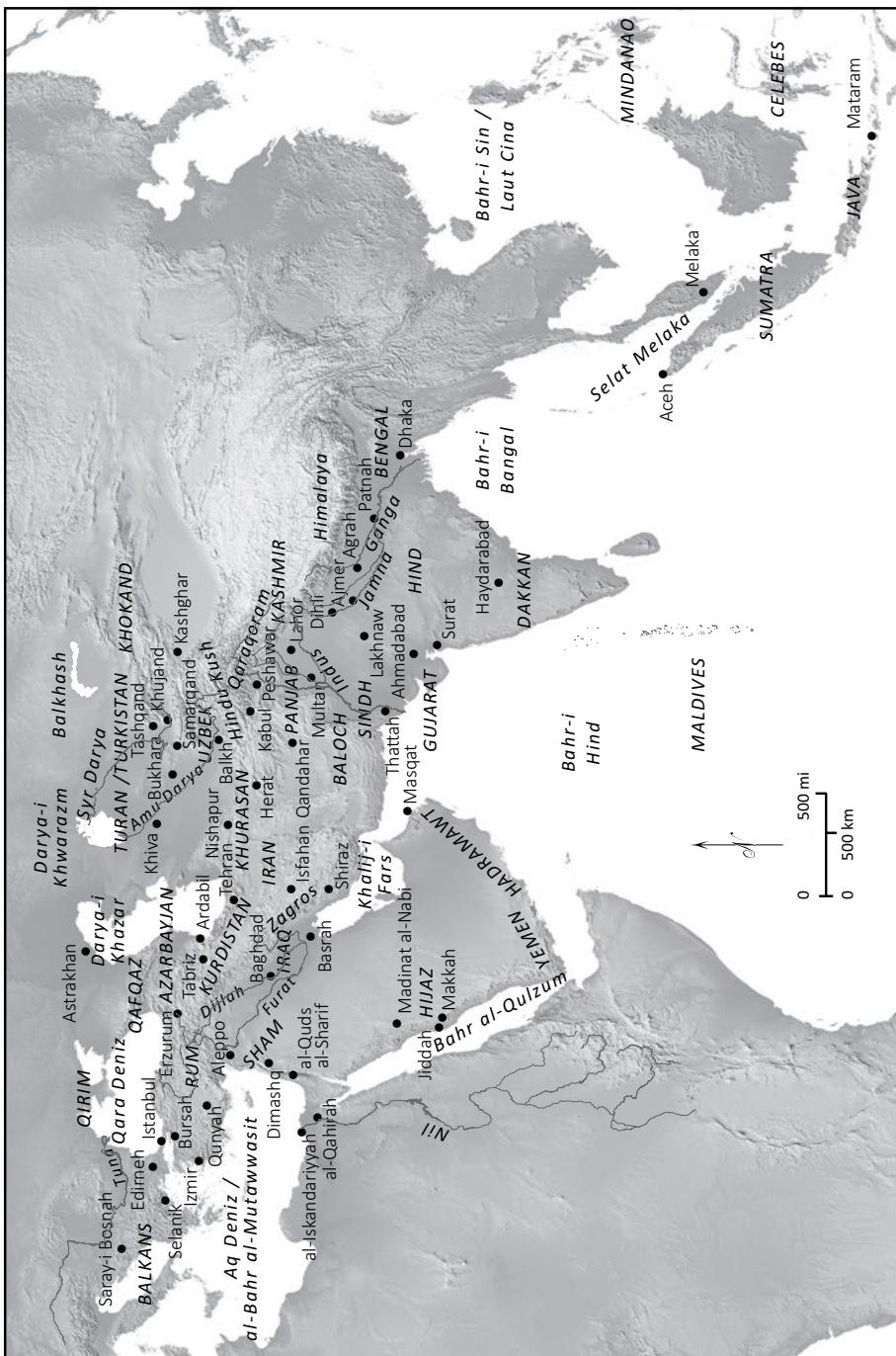


FIGURE 3. Map of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, and those regions living under its strong immediate influence.

scholars, whose eminence enhanced their reputations. Although the populations across this vast region were rent by conflicting allegiances (to sect, tribal coalition, and ethnic affiliation) and spoke many different languages . . . people on many levels of the society had similar notions about the ground-rules of cooperation and dispute, and in other ways shared a number of common institutions, arts, knowledge, customs, and rituals. These similarities of cultural style were perpetuated by poets, artists, architects, artisans, jurists, and scholars, who maintained relations among their peers in the far-flung cities of the Turko-Persian Islamicate ecumene, from Istanbul to Delhi.¹⁸²

I should like to encourage and re-orient the reader to conceive of these interconnections of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, not so much in terms of “a remarkable similarity in culture” as in terms of *a common paradigm of Islamic life and thought* by which Muslims (and others) imagined, conceptualized, valorized, articulated and gave mutually-communicable *meaning* to their lives in terms of Islam. This common paradigm of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is readily manifest in and articulated through a critically overlapping discursive canon, embedded in which is a conceptual vocabulary, an array of expressive motifs, and other mutually-held and/or mutually-translatable modes of valorization and self-articulation.

The Balkans-to-Bengal complex constitutes what we might usefully conceive of as a *post-formative stage and condition* in the history of societies of Muslims—a stage at which earlier foundational elements are brought together in a capacious and productive historical synthesis that, in turn, provides a manplex yet stable ingrediential base for a further striking forth in a dynamic variety of trajectories of being Muslim. By the thirteenth century (seventh century of Islamic history), the major theological points of dispute which had riven the community of Muslims in its first centuries were for the most part settled, with the theological schools—primarily (in terms of demographics) the Ash'aris and Mātūrīdis—agreeing to disagree over an agreed set

¹⁸² Robert L. Canfield, “Introduction: The Turko-Persian Tradition,” in Robert L. Canfield (editor), *Turco-Persia in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 1–34, at 20–21. Similarly: “The Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires are also important as a group because . . . Muslims in these contiguous empires jointly inherited political, religious, literary, and artistic traditions, and their shared inheritance was reinforced by the circulation of individuals along well-established and protected trade routes linking Istanbul with Isfahan and Delhi. Merchants, poets, artists, scholars, religious vagabonds, military advisors, and philosophers all moved with relative ease along these caravan routes and across political boundaries . . . the history of these empires illuminates a shared, complex culture,” Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 3.

of secondary theological questions.¹⁸³ Similarly, beginning from the thirteenth century, the mutual recognition by the scholars of the four Sunnī legal schools of the orthodoxy of each other's legal method and corpus of legal positions—that is, the acceptance by members of one legal school of the validity of the legal position of another school even when one position directly contradicts the other—exemplifies a larger attitudinal *normalization* of the principle of agreeing to disagree.¹⁸⁴ Also, by this time, the idea of legitimate rule exercised by an office in which are invested the combined concepts of *sultān* (sovereign), *malik* (king; exerciser of dominion), *khalifah* (Caliph; Vicegerent of God), and *pādishāh* (emperor), for the ordering and administration of society in accordance with Divine Justice—essentially what is summed up on the wine-cup of Jahāngīr where these concepts appear inscribed in close array—is universalized in this region as the norm of the political imagination.

Further, in this period, a set of institutions mark the social, physical and imaginal landscape of the Balkans-to-Bengal societies of Muslims in an inter-relational matrix that structures and configures discourse differently to what has gone before. Exemplary among these is the proliferation of the public institution of the *madrasah* (made possible by the prodigious application of the legal institution of the *waqf* endowment) which displaces the private household as the major locus of education and which, in the vast territory of Balkans-to-Bengal, is characterized by a remarkably overlapping curriculum not only of subjects and program of study, but also of books.¹⁸⁵ From the Balkans to Bengal, *madrasah* students studied similar texts: foundational works of logic such as the *Īsāghūjī* (*Isagoge*) of Athīr al-Dīn al-Abhārī (d. 1265)¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ See the various *non-polemical* works in the genre of “disagreements between the Mātūridis and the Ash‘arīs,” produced between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries in particular, such as that by the Şeyh-ül-Islām of the Ottoman empire, Shams al-Dīn b. Aḥmad b. Sulayman ibn Kamāl Pāshā, or Kemālpāşazādeh (1469–1534), *Masā'il al-ikhtilāf bayna al-Ash‘ārīrah wa al-Mātūridiyyah* (edited by Sa‘id ‘Abd al-Latīf Fūdāh), Amman: Dar al-Fath, 2009; and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. ‘Umar Kharpūtī (1830–1902), *al-Simṭ al-‘abqārī fi Sharḥ al-Taqdīr al-jawhārī fī al-faq̄ bayn al-kasbay al-Mātūridī wa al-Ash‘arī*, Istanbul: n.p., 1905 (which is a commentary on a work by a major figure of the Ottoman Mujaddidi Sufi movement, Khālid b. Aḥmad al-Naqshbandī (1776–1827), the founder of the Naqshbandiyyah Mujaddidiyyah Khālidīyyah Sufi order—the name Mujaddidiyyah indicates its link to Aḥmad Sirhindī).

¹⁸⁴ On the effects of this for the administration of law, see Yossef Rapoport, “Legal Diversity in the Age of *Taqlīd*: The Four Chief *Qādīs* Under the Mamluks,” *Islamic Law and Society* 10 (2003) 210–228.

¹⁸⁵ See Francis Robinson, “Ottomans–Safavids–Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8 (1997) 151–184.

¹⁸⁶ Two early Indian printed editions, both produced in the Kingdom of Avadh before its annexation by the East India Company in 1856, one by a private publisher, and the other by the government press, are Athīr al-Dīn Abhārī, *Īsāghūjī*, Lucknow: Dār-us-Saltānat, pre-1856; and

(whose other foundational text, the *Hidāyat al-Hikmah*, has been discussed earlier) and *al-Risālah al-Shamsiyyah* of Najm al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī al-Kātibī (d. 1204–1277);¹⁸⁷ of dialectics, such as the *Risālah Samarqandiyyah* of Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (fl. 1303) and the commentaries thereon;¹⁸⁸ of “argumentative” (that is, dialectical) philosophical theology,¹⁸⁹ such as the *Mawāqif* of ‘Aḍūd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355),¹⁹⁰ the *Maṭāli‘ al-anzār* of Abū al-Thanā’ al-İsfahānī (d. 1349),¹⁹¹ and the *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* of Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 1389);¹⁹² of Qur’ānic exegesis such as the *Kashshāf* of the Mu‘tazilī rationalist, Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144),¹⁹³ and the “toning-down” of the rationalism of the

Athīr al-Dīn Abharī, *Mīr Ȧsāghūjī*, Lucknow: Āghā Jān, pre-1856. These were almost certainly printed for purchase by madrasah students. An early printed edition of a famous commentary on the *Ȧsāghūjī* used in the Ottoman *medresehs* is Muhammed b. Ḥamzah al-Fanārī (1350–1451), *Ȧsāgūcī ṣerhī Fenārī*, Istanbul: Mekteb-i Ṣenayi‘i Matba‘ah, 1892.

¹⁸⁷ Some sense of the continuing historical importance of the *Shamsiyyah* may be discerned from the fact of its publication in 1905 by the government press in Cairo a volume containing no less than seven commentaries and supercommentaries on the work dating from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries: *al-Majmū‘ al-mushtamil ‘alā Sharḥ al-Risālah al-Shamsiyyah fī al-mantiq, ta‘līf Najm al-Dīn ‘Umar b. ‘Alī al-Qazwīnī al-ma‘rūf bi-al-Kātibī, li-Qutb al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muhammed al-Rāzī, wa ‘alā Hāshiyat ‘Abd al-Hakīm al-Siyālkūtī, wa Hāshiyat al-‘allāmah al-Dasūqī, wa Hāshiyat al-‘allāmah Iṣām al-Dīn ‘alā Sharḥ al-Qutb, wa Taqrīr ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Shīrbīnī ‘alā Hāshiyat ‘Abd al-Hakīm, wa Hāshiyat al-Jalāl al-Dawwānī, wa Sharḥ al-Sa‘d ‘alā al-Shamsiyyah*, Cairo: al-Matba‘ah al-Amīriyah, 1905.

¹⁸⁸ Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *al-Risālah al-Samarqandiyyah fī Ȧdāb al-baḥth*, in Maḥmūd al-Imām al-Manṣūrī (editor), *Majmū‘ah mushtamilah ‘alā al-āti bayānu-hu: Badr al-‘illah fī kashf ghawāmiḍ al-maqūlāt wa huwa Sharḥ al-Shaykh ‘Umar al-mashhūr bi-Ibn Qaraḥdāghī ‘alā Risālat al-Maqūlāt li-Mullā ‘Alī al-Qiziljī, wa Risālat al-Imām al-Kalanbawī fī Ȧdāb al-baḥth ma‘a hāshiyatay-hā, aḥadu-humā li-al-‘Allāmah al-Shaykh ‘Umar al-madhkūr, wa al-thāniyah li-Mullā ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Banjawānī, wa tali hādhīhi aydan Ȧdāb al-Hakīm Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, wa tali hādhīhi aydan Ȧdāb al-Shārif al-Jurjānī*, Cairo: Matba‘at al-Sa‘ādah, 1935, at 125–132 (the volume contains a total of five works on disputation theory, all authored in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex).

¹⁸⁹ The rendering of *kalām* as “philosophical theology” is now standard; “argumentative theology” (which usefully suggests the link to dialectics) is the characterization of Richard C. Taylor, “Philosophy,” in Robert Irwin (editor), *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 4, Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 532–563, at 532–533.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Aḍūd al-Dīn al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fī ‘ilm al-kalām*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabbi, n.d. For the numerous commentaries on the *Mawāqif* known to Kātib Çelebi in the seventeenth century, see Kātib Çelebi, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 1891–1894.

¹⁹¹ This is a commentary on the *Tawāli‘ al-anzār* of al-Baydāwī; see Abū al-Thanā’ Shams al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-İsfahānī, *Maṭāli‘ al-anzār ma‘a matni-hi Tawāli‘ al-anwār li-al-Qādī ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar al-Baydāwī*, Istanbul: Şirket-i İlmīyyeh, 1887. See now the translation by Edward E. Calverley and James W. Pollock, *Nature, Man and God in Medieval Islam: ‘Abd Allāh Baydāwī’s Text Tawāli‘ al-Anzar min Matalī‘ al-Anzar along with Mahmud Isfahānī’s Commentary Matalī‘ al-anzar Sharḥ Tawāli‘ al-Anwar*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002.

¹⁹² Mas‘ūd b. ‘Umar al-Taftazānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid fī ‘ilm al-kalām*, Istanbul: Matba‘at al-Hajj Muḥtaram Afandi Busnawī, 1305 h [1888].

¹⁹³ For a sense of the prodigious circulation of the work in the pre-modern period, see the list

Kashshāfi in the *Anwār al-tanzīl* of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar al-Bayḍāwī (*fl.* 1305);¹⁹⁴ of Hadith (not only the *Šaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, but also later Hadith selections, such as the *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ* of Walī al-Dīn al-Tibrīzī (*fl.* 1337);¹⁹⁵ and of *fiqh*-jurisprudence, such as, in the cases of the Ḥanafī Ottoman and Mughal *madrasahs*, the *Hidāyah* of Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī (d. 1197), and the commentaries thereon.¹⁹⁶

The Balkans-to-Bengal complex is also a prolific theatre of operations for the re-infrastructure of society by the local and universal organizations of the Sufi *tariqahs*—with which the absolute majority of Muslims were in one way or another associated. The physical institutions of the Sufi *tariqahs*, namely the *khāngāh*, *zāwiyyah*, *dargāh*, *tekkeh* and *merkez*, functioned as the physical sites for a range of truth-seeking and truth-experiencing activities such as *dhikr* (collective ritual remembrance of/with God), *samā‘* (collective auditory communion with Real-Truth), *ziyārah* (visitation of saint-tombs to benefit from the cosmic economy of the Sufi’s *barakah* or spiritual power), *i‘tikāf* (meditative retreat); and the ongoing teaching of these practices and of Sufi texts. Especially seminal in the expansion of the Sufi phenomenon in societies of Muslims were the works of Ibn ‘Arabī, and the development of his ideas by his philosophical commentators (such as his step-son, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, d. 1274,¹⁹⁷ and such as the first professor appointed to the first-ever Ottoman imperial *medreseh*, Dā’ūd al-Qaysarī, d. 1350)¹⁹⁸ who elaborated “a system of thought strongly rooted in Sufism, but which adopted a systematic

of the hundreds of extant manuscripts in Mu‘assasat Āl al-Bayt, al-Majmā‘ al-Maliki li-Buhūth al-Ḥadārah al-Islāmiyyah, *al-Fihris al-shāmil li-al-turāth al-‘arabī al-islāmī al-makhtūt: ‘ulūm al-qur‘ān, makhtūtāt al-tafsīr wa ‘ulūmu-hu*, Amman: Mu‘assasat Āl al-Bayt, 1989, 155–188.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Bayḍāwī based his commentary squarely on the *Kashshāfi*, but sought to adjust content that was problematically expressive of al-Zamakhsharī’s rationalism. For a sense of the prodigious circulation of al-Bayḍāwī’s Qur‘ān commentary in the pre-modern period, see the hundreds of extant manuscripts listed in Mu‘assasat Āl al-Bayt, *al-Fihris al-shāmil: al-Tafsīr*, 280–334.

¹⁹⁵ See Ahmed and Filipovic, “The Sultan’s Syllabus,” 201; Kātib Çelebī, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 1700.

¹⁹⁶ See Y. Meron, “Marghīnānī, His Method and His Legacy,” *Islamic Law and Society* 9 (2002), 410–416; for a long list of the commentaries on the *Hidāyah*, see Hājjī Khalifah, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 2031–2040; see also Cengiz Kallek, “el-Hidāye,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988–2013, 17:471–473.

¹⁹⁷ See William C. Chittick, “Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1981) 171–184.

¹⁹⁸ Dā’ūd al-Qaysarī’s introduction to Akbarian thought was widely circulated and taught throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal. The ongoing importance of the work is reflected in two early printings, one from Iran and one from India: Da’ūd b. Maḥmūd al-Qaysarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Tehran: Dār al-Tibā’ah-i ‘Ilmiyyah-i Madrasah-i Mubārakah-i Dār-ul-Funūn, 1882; and Da’ūd b. Maḥmūd al-Qaysarī, *Maṭla‘ khuṣūṣ al-kilām fi ma‘āni Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Bombay: Mīrzā Muḥammad Shīrāzī, 1883.

language of philosophy,”¹⁹⁹ thereby producing what Su‘ād al-Hakim has so rightly summed up as nothing less than “the birth of a new language.”²⁰⁰ As will be illustrated in the course of this book, the meaning of man’s place in the cosmos came to be conceived of and expressed in the terms of the “new language” of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam (the historical self-consciousness of which is expressed in the fact that another of the philosophical expounders of Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, d. 1330, authored a famous dictionary of Sufi concepts, precisely as a guide to this new vocabulary).²⁰¹ This new philosophical-Sufi way of conceiving, seeing and articulating the cosmos amounted, effectively, to a cosmological re-infrastructure in the apperceptions of the Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal.

It is not “merely” the case that the fundamental orienting concepts of the philosophical-Sufi amalgam were transposed by Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex into a cosmological trajectory. Rather, Muslims also transposed the fundamental orienting concepts of the philosophical-Sufi amalgam into an *anthropological* trajectory—which is to say that the human being was similarly conceived by these Muslims in these terms—most crucially by the re-infrastructuring of the human being as *micro-cosmos*. This is, of course, the famous anthropocosmic/cosmoanthropic concept of the Perfect or Complete Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) elaborated by Ibn ‘Arabī, and subsequently in Iran by ‘Azīz-i Nasafī (fl. 1273)²⁰² and in Yemen by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jili (1366–1424).²⁰³ While very, very few human beings are the completely perfect human, all human beings are potentially *perfectable* or *complete-able*—and the consciousness-orientation of living towards completion or perfection of the self was informed, in the societies of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, by the further foundational idiom of the Suhrāwardian concept of Illumination (*ishrāq*) of the self. This orientation is evident in the literary and artistic self-statements of Muslims who lived in the Balkans-to-Bengal paradigm which may readily be observed to be marked by a developing and sophisticated discourse of self-conceptualization and self-articulation of individuals and of collectives that located the self in the cosmos and the cosmos in the self precisely in the terms articulated by the Sufi-philosophical amalgam (the central-

¹⁹⁹ Caner Dagli, “From Mysticism to Philosophy (and Back): An Ontological History of the School of the Oneness of Being,” PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2006, viii.

²⁰⁰ Su‘ād al-Hakim, *Ibn ‘Arabī wa mawlid lughah jadidah*, Beirut: al-Mu’assasah al-Jāmi‘ah li-al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tibā‘ah, 1991, especially 59–92.

²⁰¹ This has been published numerous times, for example: ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Iṣtilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyyah* (edited by ‘Abd al-Latīf Muḥammad ‘Abd), Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1977.

²⁰² See Lloyd Ridgeon, *Aziz Nasafi*, Richmond: Curzon, 1998.

²⁰³ See Reynold A. Nicholson, “The Perfect Man,” in Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921, 77–148.

ity and significance of the idea of the *self* to the conceptualization of Islam/Islamic will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 5).

This discourse of self-conceptualization and self-articulation is the poetical and narrative tradition of the literary canon of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, a tradition to which the concepts and vocabularies of the abovementioned Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Rūmī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Tūsī, Hāfiẓ, and of other authors of the canon—such as Sa‘dī, the author of the staple works of Persian literacy and literariness, the *Gulistān* and *Būstān*, ‘Attār and Jāmī, the pre-eminent translators of the cosmology and sensibility of “philosophical religion” into Persian verse, and Shabistarī, popularizer in his best-selling *Gulshan-i Rāz*, or *Garden of the Secret*, of the *madhhab* of Love and of the philosophy of paradox and figural meaning—were *foundational* and *seminal*. Their canonical discourses constituted the *paideia* and, thus, the larger modes of thinking and the communicative idiom of the Muslims of this space and age—and as such, constituted an integral element in the *hermeneutics of Islam* of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex.²⁰⁴ The members of the communities educated by and affiliated with these ideas constructed themselves—and communicated and represented themselves to each other—by the performance of (verbal and other) acts made meaningful in the shared language of this *paidēia*. These communities of Muslims were characterized by a complex of social behaviours in which, for example, the consumption of wine and of figural images was *routine* and somehow *valued positively*.

This fact should and must give us profound pause as to what it is that constitutes the *normative* in the historical experience of Muslims—after which instructive moment of contemplation, we should recognize, once and for all, that these ideas and behaviours constituted part and parcel of the *norms of thought and conduct* of Muslims. By *norm*, I mean: that which Muslims—that is, the significant body of Muslims who held these ideas and practiced these behaviours; who, in the historical example I am highlighting, were quite simply the most powerful and influential social group in Islamic history: namely, the educated and cultivated Sunnī and Shi‘ī elites of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex and the areas under its shadow in the half-millennium, 1350–1850—valorized at worst as neutral and at best as positive; or that which these Muslims regarded, at the very least, as legitimate and acceptable, and at most, as how things should *ideally* be.

These ideas and behaviours constitute a commonplace and standard part of the ways in which the cultivated and thoughtful Muslims who engaged in

²⁰⁴ For a demonstration of the pervasive influence of Avicennan philosophy and Akbarian Sufism in the high culture of the Ottoman part of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, see again Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire*.

them thought and lived *as Muslims*. These societies of persons thought and lived these things without regarding themselves as transgressing thereby what it *meant* to be a Muslim—indeed, these ideas and behaviours were construed, as paradoxical as it might seem, to be not only in harmony with, but actually as somehow articulating the meaning and *truth* of Islam.

In short, the Balkans-to-Bengal is a complex of societies in a post-formative stage of *being Muslim*, a productive human condition grounded upon the synthesis of discursive and institutional elements worked through and built up during the first six centuries of Islam on the basis of which many Muslims found themselves equipped and disposed to strike out in new constructions, trajectories, tenors and expressions of *what it means to be Muslim*. Unlike many Muslims of today, the Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex did not feel the need to articulate or legitimate their Muslim-ness/their Islam by mimesis of a pristine time of the earliest generations of the community (the *salaf*). Rather, they felt able to be Muslim in explorative, creative, and contrary trajectories—such as those treated in the six diagnostic questions above—taking as a point of departure the array and synthesis of the major developments of the preceding centuries, with the Avicennian, Suhrawardian, and Akbarian ideas very much present at the center of this post-formative dynamic. In the dynamics of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, received elements and units of meaning are taken up, elaborated into a new relational and generational complex, and are made productive of new meanings in a new vocabulary of Islam.

Like many modern Muslims, many modern analysts too have fallen into what Robert Wisnovsky has identified as “our tendency to focus on the earliest period of Islamic history—the ‘classical period’ between 700 and 1050—and then to assume that this classical distinctiveness expresses something natural in Islamic intellectual history. In other words, the classical period is viewed as the model Islamic disciplinary arrangement, with subsequent developments seen as pale reflections or decadent versions of the pristine, ‘true.’”²⁰⁵ The reflexive logic of this conceptual and analytical disposition—

²⁰⁵ Wisnovsky, who is writing here specifically about the study of the relationship between *falsafah* and *kalām*, goes on to assert: “More historically justifiable would be to determine the nature of the relationship between *falsafa* and *kalām* on the basis of evidence contained in texts produced during the longest segment of Islamic intellectual history . . . the 850-year span between 1050 and 1900 taken as the defining period,” Robert Wisnovsky, “Islam,” in M.W.F. Stone and Robert Wisnovsky, “Philosophy and Theology,” in Robert Parnau (editor), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 2:687–706 (subsection at 698–706), 706. In another context, Frédéric Volpi notes that “traditional Islamic studies stressed two types of continuities at the expense of all others. First . . . the semantic continuity provided by the Islamic legal and theological texts (usually written in Arabic) . . . Second, they

which is the principle “the original is the authentic”—bears a peculiar similarity to that of modern Salafism (the conviction that the earliest Muslims, primarily, the Companions of the Prophet, and secondarily, the two generations that followed them, constitute the modular community whose beliefs and practice embody true Islam).²⁰⁶ I aver that our task as analysts, whether historians or anthropologists, is to conceptualize this post-formative Balkans-to-Bengal Islam *as Islam* despite—indeed, *because of*—the inconveniences this task poses to our analytical habits. The Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal were in no doubt as to the authenticity of their complex and contradictory post-formative modes of being Muslim, and as to their coherence with/as Islam: the logic of our conceptualization of Islam must, therefore, if it is to be analytically meaningful, encompass their conceptualization—and must not exclude, marginalize, or delegitimate it.

The Balkans-to-Bengal complex represents the most geographically, demographically and temporally extensive instance of a highly-articulated shared paradigm of life and thought in the history of Muslims—it is, demographically, spatially, and temporally, an (if not *the*) *historically major paradigm* of Islam. Extending as it does over half a millennium and more than half the world (of Muslims), the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is certainly the dominant paradigm of Islam in the long historical period that directly preceded the violent irruption of European modernity into societies of Muslims. It is important to bear in mind that, from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, what we might call the “Old World” of Islam—that is, the historically significant societies of Arabic-speaking Muslims of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, ‘Iraq, and the Hijaz—were under Ottoman rule and thus directly under the paradigmatic influence of the norms of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. We must also remember that the Islam that arrived at the shores of and took root in the vast Malay archipelago (what we might call the “New World” of Islam) was heavily pregnant with the norms of the Indian region of the Balkans-to-Bengal. Yet, when moderns—both Muslims and non-Muslims—think about Islam in representative terms, our overwhelming conceptual and analytical tendency is to marginalize and dis-enfranchise the paradigm of Islamic life and thought of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. When we think about *what repre-*

emphasized the continuity between the past—often the very distant past—and present; Frédéric Volpi, *Political Islam Observed: Disciplinary Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 43. This analytically unhelpful privileging of the very distant (Arabic) past as the necessary and default conceptual model of Islam is one of the things I am seeking here to undo.

²⁰⁶ A convenient introduction to the substance and scale of modern Salafism is the collection of essays edited by Roel Meijer (editor), *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

sents Islam, we tend *not* to think of Balkans-to-Bengal in the period 1350–1850. It is very much for this reason that I am taking the Balkans-to-Bengal complex as the primary socio-historical case in this book: it is at once a major and a dominant historical paradigm of Islam—but is largely unrecognized as such. The purpose, then, is to answer the question “What is Islam?” by way of this Balkans-to-Bengal paradigm that—despite its scale, centrality, duration, maturity, articulation, and capaciousness—by and large, and for no good reason, usually is *not* conceived of as sufficiently “central” or “authentic” as to be appropriate to the question.

It should be needless to say that my focus on the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is in no way to delegitimate the normative Islam of the paradigm of any other region or period (and examples from other times and places will duly be cited in the course of this book). Neither is it the case that the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is so peculiar or unique as to be schematically unrepresentative or inapplicable of anything other than its (very large and protracted) self. Rather, the point is that re-directing our analytical and conceptual gaze to the normativities of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex will help us to recognize as integral to the meaningful conceptualization of Islam features and elements that, by focusing on other regions and periods, we have grown accustomed to marginalize and ignore. And once we have reconceptualized Islam in a manner and mode that accounts for the normativities of Balkans-to-Bengal complex, it will be possible to turn (back) to other periods and regions and to view them in a new light and with the benefit of a new perspective which will enable us to *see things that we have been unable to see before*. By taking the expansive, capacious and contradictory Balkans-to-Bengal complex as our representative case-study, we are, in the first instance, forced to think about how to conceptualize Islam in expansive, capacious and contradictory terms—and in the second instance, to look at other historical instances and expressions of Islam through this reconceptualization of Islam.

Finally, some readers might think that what I am calling the “Balkans-to-Bengal complex” is better termed the “Perso-Turkic” or “Persianate” world.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ The cultural integrality of this geographical space was particularly emphasized by Marshall G. S. Hodgson, who designated this “zone” and “phase” of Islamic civilization by the term “Persianate,” that is, characterized by “cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration” (Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2:293). Hodgson noted: “In the High Middle Ages Islamic cultural life had come to be divided more or less sharply into two geographical zones and this division became more marked after the Mongol conquests. In Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, North Africa, and the Sudanese lands, Arabic continued to predominate as the literary tongue even where it was not the spoken language . . . From the Balkans east to Turkestan and China and south to southern India and into Malaysia, Persian became the standard literary language among Muslims, and with Persian came a whole tradition of artistic and literary taste . . .

The problem with these terms is that they assumptively privilege linguistic and “ethnic” elements, suggesting that it is these eponymous factors that are somehow the *distinguishing and generative source* of the phenomenon at stake. My point is not to deny or detract from the presence or importance of historical elements of pre-Islamic Persian or Turkic origin in the construction or articulation of Islam in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex; my objection is that the term “Persianate,” used as a primary marker or adjective of first-instance, highlights and suggests “Persian” as the constitutive and definitive *genius* of the shared Islamic paradigm of the Balkans-to-Bengal historical space, rather than as a very important component element in ongoing relational engagement with and alongside other elements. The term “Persianate” serves to distract and detract from other generative elements in the paradigm—such as the prolific, fecund and (in so many ways) importantly anti-thetical and disorienting Indic/Hindu elements, the challenge of engaging with which so productively and profoundly inflected and informed the articulation of Islam in the environment of the Indian subcontinent, which, in the period of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, became home to the largest geographical concentration of Muslims on the planet (and of which examples will appear shortly). This term serves also to detract from the continuing centrality and fundamentality of *Arabic* discourses to the construction of Islamic meaning and value throughout the historical space and discourses characterized as “Persianate.”

“Persianate” thus runs too ready a risk of falling into service of the ever-recrudescent appeal of conceptualizing Islamic history in terms of “Persian” and “Arab” nationalist readings.²⁰⁸ “Balkans-to-Bengal” is (not only) a more neutral term, but is better expressive of the ethnic and linguistic diversity and cultural heritages of this complex of historical societies and discourses. It is of prime importance always to bear in mind that the Balkans-to-Bengal is a *locally polyglot* region (that is, with more than one language spoken in local settings—often by the same people); and that the producers of its high culture,

This is the phenomenon that makes Toynbee distinguish, in the late medieval period, two Islamic ‘civilizations’, an Iranic and an Arabic . . . The Persian zone was not only the more populous but also by and large the more culturally creative,” Marshall G. S. Hodgson, “The unity of later Islamic history,” in Marshall G. S. Hodgson (edited, with an Introduction and Conclusion, by Edmund Burke III), *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 171–206, at 189 (this collection of Hodgson’s writings was published two decades after his death). The term “Persianate” has recently been taken up actively in the scholarship so that there is now a *Journal of Persianate Studies*.

²⁰⁸ I prefer to use the term “Persophone/Persophony” to characterize the register of phenomena that are tied to the fact of the Persian language used as the primary vehicle for literary self-expression. On Persophone/Persophony, see Bert G. Fragner, *“Die Persophonie”: Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens*, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999.

in particular, were, above all, “poly-phone”—as is nicely exemplified in the fact that the Ottoman class defined itself not at all by ethnicity, but rather by knowledge of the *elsineh-i selāseh* (the three languages) of Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman, and their accompanying textual canons and *paideia*. Similarly, the seventeenth-century Mughal *Book of the Gentleman* (*Mīrzānāmah*) stipulated that a gentleman (*Mīrzā*) must have knowledge of all of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and “Hindi” (the language that would come to be known as Urdu).²⁰⁹ Above all, though, “Persianate,” “Turco-Persian,” and other such ethnic and linguistic identifications distract from the fundamental conceptual and analytical point towards which I am seeking to orient and habituate the reader: namely, that what we find articulated in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is a major historical paradigm that is most meaningfully conceptualized not terms of the Persianate, Turkic, or Perso-Turkic, but of *Islam*.



Now, it might be objected that the six examples that I have presented are representative of *elite* society and culture, and that the society of elites is necessarily unrepresentative of society-at-large in that it possesses an isolated high culture the beliefs and practices of which are more likely to deviate from the accepted norms of “Islam-at-large”—which we might be inclined to assume to be more legally-determined or “orthodox” norms. To make this objection is to omit to take into account at least four important socio-historical facts.

The first is that the norms of this Balkans-to-Bengal elite were not hermetically isolated in high society but, rather, were part of an active economy of circulation of norms that moved through society-at-large by way of *active projects of circulation*, such as the epitomizing of fundamental Sufi-philosophical ideas in vernacular primers, as well as, and most importantly, the translation, configuration and dramatization of these ideas into poetical and narrative fiction, which served as the primary medium for their oral circulation. An excellent case-study of the circulation of “norms” through society is provided by Nazif Shahrani, who asks the question, “How is the Islamic vision of the world socially produced, reproduced, communicated, and sustained among the peoples of Afghanistan, both literate and urban as well as illiterate and rural? That is, how is the received Islamic knowledge contained in the ‘Great’ literate tradition of *madrasa* and ‘ulama mediated, appropriated

²⁰⁹ Mawlawi M. Hidayat Husain, “The Mīrza-Nāmah (The Book of the Perfect Gentleman) of Mīrza Kāmrān with an English Translation,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, n.s., 9 (1913), 1–13, at 9.

and transformed into popular sources of knowledge easily accessible to the majority of illiterate Afghans and, for that matter, Turkistanis and other Muslims?" The answer: "A substantial part of the corpus of the high tradition of Islamic knowledge has been mediated by the social production and reproduction of vernacular popular Islamic texts, and thereby made available to the masses of non-literate Muslims . . . When this body of local Islamic knowledge and understanding is acquired and sustained through lifelong exposure to elements of textual materials and the day-to-day interactions of the members of a community, it *becomes a part* of the individual Muslim practitioner."²¹⁰ Shahrani cites as prominent examples of these textual materials by which "Islamic knowledge and understanding is acquired" the *Dīvāns* of Ḥāfiẓ, Sa‘dī, Bidil, and love epics such as *Laylā va Majnūn* (of Nizāmī), *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* (of Jāmī), *Farhad va Shīrīn*, as well as books of proverbs (*żarb-ul-miṣāl*), and narrative fiction (*afsānah, hikāyah, qissah*).²¹¹ In a similar vein, Margaret A. Mills records from her extensive conversations in the 1970s with an Afghan Molla in a village about three hours journey from Herat, who was well-known in the rural locale both as a *teacher* (*ākhund*) and *storyteller*: "The Akhond's conception of religious books is broad . . . including didactic (but nontheological) works such as *Anwār-i Suhaylī* (*The Lights of Canopus*, a famous fifteenth-century Persian derivative of the Indic-origin story collection *Kalila wa Dimna*)."²¹² The pre-Islamic Sanskrit animal fables of Bidpai, put, before the advent of Islam, into Pahlavi Persian, then re-cast into Arabic in the newly-built city of Baghdad by the eighth-century 'Abbāsid vizier, Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 759), and centuries thence imaginatively re-elaborated back into Persian by al-Ḥusayn Vā'iz-i Kāshifi (d. 1504, who is also the author of one the most widely circulated Persian language commentaries on the Qur'ān)²¹³ serves as the narrative fictional means by which for a twentieth-century rural Afghan scholar to teach Islamic values and meanings to his congregation (and I can attest from my personal experience of collecting early Indian printed books that the *Anwār-i Suhaylī* was a regularly pub-

²¹⁰ Nazif Shahrani, "Local Knowledge of Islam and Social Discourse in Afghanistan and Turkistan in the Modern Period," in Robert L. Canfield (editor), *Turco-Persia in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 161–188, at 164, 177.

²¹¹ Shahrani, "Local Knowledge of Islam," 167.

²¹² Margaret A. Mills, *Rhetoric and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991, 88.

²¹³ On him, see Maria E. Subtelny, "Husayn Vā'iz-i Kashifi: Polymath, Popularizer and Preserver," *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003) 463–467; on his Qur'ān commentary, see Kristin Zahra Sands, "On the Popularity of Husayn Vā'iz-i Kashifi's *Mavāhib-i 'aliyya*: A Persian Commentary on the Qur'an," *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003) 469–483; on the *Anwār-i Suhaylī*, see Christine van Ruymbeke, "Kashifi's Forgotten Masterpiece: Why Rediscover the *Anwār-i Suhaylī?*" *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003) 571–588.

lished—and thus, presumably, widely-read—book in nineteenth-century India).²¹⁴ In a vivid illustration of the foregoing environment, the Tajik national poet, Șadr-ud-Dīn ‘Aynī (1878–1954), tells how, as a child in the 1880s in a small village some forty miles from the great city of Bukhara, “in the school run by the imam’s wife I read Hafiz, something of Bedil and some of the lyrics of Sa’ib,”²¹⁵ and recounts how the *ghazals* of that most metaphorically complex of poets, Mirzā ‘Abd-ul-Qādir “Bīdil” of Delhi (1642–1720), were sung by the peasants of the local countryside as they laboured in their fields;²¹⁶ while the young Swiss traveler, Nicholas Bouvier, recorded in 1953 that “the beggars of Tabriz knew hundreds of stanzas by Hafiz or Nizami, which spoke of love, of mystical wine, of May sunshine through the windows.”²¹⁷ The eminent scholar of Ottoman literature Walter Andrews is right to argue in a work instructively entitled *Poetry’s Voice, Society’s Song* that we should “look at the *gazel* as a part of a continuing spectrum of poetry, including both *divan* [literally, “court”] and folk poetry, emerging from the needs and motivations of a single cultural entity.”²¹⁸

A relatively economical means by which to encapsulate the way in which poetry-as-song functioned as the prodigious recitative and performative vehicle for the circulation in society-at-large of concepts, values, meanings and *norms* that we might otherwise consider to be restricted to the high intellectual culture of elites is *via* the Indus valley genre of *kāfī*. A *kāfī* is a Sufi poem composed expressly to be sung. The following *kāfī* is by the most celebrated poet of the Sirā’ikī language (spoken today by close to 20 million people),

²¹⁴ A project that I have undertaken over several years of collecting early Indian printed books for Widener Library (Harvard University) has uncovered several nineteenth-century Indian editions of the *Anvār-i Suhaylī*. The work is so well-known to nineteenth-century Indian readers that the title-page of some editions does not bother to mention the author’s name. See, for example: Husayn Kāshifī, *Anvār-i Suhaylī*, Bombay: n.p., 1261 h [1845]; al-Husayn Vā’iz-i Kāshifī, *Anvār-i Suhaylī*, Kanpur: Niżāmī, 1281 h [1864]; al-Husayn Vā’iz-i Kāshifī, *Anvār-i Suhaylī*, Lucknow: Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Khān, 1295 h [1876]; *Anvār-i Suhaylī*, Kanpur: Naval Kishōr, 1885; *Anvār-i Suhaylī*, Lucknow: Munshi Gulab Singh, 1898. The importance of the work in the Indian environment made it required reading for officers of the East India Company, hence the edition: al-Husayn b. ‘Ali Vā’iz-i Kāshifī, *Anvār-i Suhaylī* (edited by J.W.J. Ouseley), Hertford: Hon. East-India Company, 1851.

²¹⁵ Sadriddin Aini, *Pages from My Own Story: Memoirs*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958, 4.

²¹⁶ Sadriddin Aynī, *The Sands of Oxus: Boyhood Reminiscences of Sadriddin Aynī* (translated by John R. Perry and Rachel Lehr), Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1998, 176. The other poet mentioned by Aynī, Sa’ib of Tabriz (d. 1676) is, similarly, one the more metaphorically difficult Persian poets; on him see Paul Losensky, “Sa’eb Tabrizi,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saeb-tabrizi.

²¹⁷ Nicholas Bouvier, *The Way of the World*, New York: New York Review of Books, 1992, 118.

²¹⁸ Walter G. Andrews, *Poetry’s Voice, Society’s Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985, 179–180.

Khwājah Ghulām Farīd of Multān (1845–1902). Khwājah Ghulām Farīd was heir to a line of Chishtī *pīrs* (custodians of a shrine and *tariqah*) at Mithankōth in the district of Dērā Ghāzī Khān in the very heart of the Indus valley, who himself had a thorough formal education, and whose leading disciple and patron was the ruler of the state of Bahāwalpūr, Amir Sādiq Muḥammad Khān IV (r. 1866–1899). The poetry of Khwājah Ghulām Farīd, however, was (and is to this day) widely sung to popular (and, often, illiterate) audiences at Sufi shrines throughout the Indus valley (and is now readily accessible in song on YouTube). The following is one of Khwājah Ghulām Farīd's most famous and widely-sung *kāfīs*, the content of which is highly instructive to the present demonstrative purpose.

Oh! Real-True Beauty, Beginning-less Light!
 Shall I call you “Necessary,” or shall I call you “Contingent-Possible”?
 Shall I call you “Creator,” “Pre-Eternal Self-Essence”?
 Shall I call you a “New Event”? Shall I call you a “Creation in this World”?
 Shall I call you “Absolute Pure Existence”?
 Shall I call you the “Becoming Known of the Originary Archetypes”? . . .
 Shall I call you the “Essence of the Reality of Quiddity”?
 Shall I call you the “Display of Attributes and Acts”?
 Shall I call you “Species”? Shall I call you “Positions”?
 Shall I call you “Modes”? Shall I call you “Measures”? . . .
 Shall I call you “Highest Heaven”? Shall I call you the “Celestial Spheres”?
 Shall I call you “Grace” and “Blessing” and “Wisdom”?
 Shall I call you “Spirit”? Shall I call you “Matter”?
 Shall I call you “Vegetable,” “Animal,” or “Human”?
 Shall I call you “Mosque” or “Temple” or “Convent”?
 Shall I call you Pōthī, or shall I call you Qur’ān?
 Shall I call you “Rosary”? Shall I call you “Caste-String”?
 Shall I call you “Unbelief”? Shall I call you “Faith”?
 Shall I call you “Rain-Cloud”? Shall I call you “Thunder”?
 Shall I call you “Lightning”? Shall I call you “Downpour”?
 Shall I call you “Water”? Shall I call you “Earth”?
 Shall I call you “Wind”? Shall I call you “Fire”?
 Shall I call you Dasrat, Bichhman, or Rām?
 Shall I call you “Sītā, my Darling One”? . . .
 Shall I call you Mahā Dēv? Shall I call you Bhagwān?

Shall I call you Gita, Granth or Veda? . . .
 Shall I call you Noah, or shall I call you “Flood”?
 Shall I call you Abraham? Shall I call you “Friend”?²¹⁹
 Shall I call you Moses, son of ‘Imrān?²²⁰ . . .
 Shall I call you Aḥmad of the High Office?²²¹ . . .
 Shall I call you the “Beloved of Every Heart”?
 Shall I call you “Hourī,” “Fairy-Lass,” or “Handsome Lad”? . . .
 Shall I call you “Blush”? Shall I call you “Kohl”? Shall I call you *pān*?²²²
 . . . Shall I call you “Beauty”? “Embellishment and Adornment”? . . .
 Shall I call you *tablāh* or “Tambour”?
 Shall I call you *dhōlak*?²²³ Shall I call you “Metre” or “Note-Beat”?
 . . . Shall I call you “Love”? Shall I call you “Science”?
 Shall I call you “Suspicion-Prehension”?²²⁴ “Conviction”? “Notion”?
 Shall I call you “Sensing”? Shall I call you “Faculty of Discernment”?
 Shall I call you “Tasting”? Shall I call you “Rapture”?
 Shall I call you “Submission”? Shall I call you “Variegation”?
 Shall I call you “Fixity”? Shall I call you “Knowing-By-Self”?
 Shall I call you “Hyacinth”? “Iris”? “Cypress”?
 Shall I call you the “Ungovernable Narcissus”?
 Shall I call you the “Scarred Tulip”? Shall I call you “Garden”?
 Shall I call you “Rose-Garden”? Shall I call you “Flower-Garden”?
 Shall I call you “Drunkeness” or “Drunk”?
 Shall I call you “Bewilderment” or “Bewildered”?
 Shall I call you “Without Colour”? Shall I call you “Without
 Any Likeness”?
 Shall I call you “Without Form”? Shall I call you “Every-Every
 Moment”?²²⁵

²¹⁹ The Qur’ān refers to Ibrāhīm (Abraham) as the *khalil* or “friend” of God, Qur’ān 4:125 al-Nisā.

²²⁰ In the Qur’ān, Mūsā (Moses) is the son of ‘Imrān.

²²¹ *Aḥmad-i ‘āli-shāh*; i.e., the Prophet Mūhammad.

²²² *Pān* is a preparation of various condiments, usually including areca nut and slaked lime, wrapped in the leaf of the betel (*pān*) tree, widely consumed in the Indian subcontinent as digestive, narcotic and breath-freshener.

²²³ The *dhōlak* is the large two-headed portable drum that is a standard instrument in rural and popular North Indian music.

²²⁴ *Vahm* is a difficult concept to translate: in the Indus valley languages it carries the sense of “suspicion” (both positive and negative); “prehension” is the rendering for the Arabic philosophical concept, *wahm*, proposed by Parviz Morewedge, “Epistemology: The Internal Sense of Prehension (Wahm) in Islamic Philosophy,” in Parviz Morewedge, *Essays in Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2003, 139–179.

²²⁵ *aē husn-i hakīki nūr-i azal / tēnūn vājib tē imkān kahūn // tēnūn khāliq zāt-i kadīm kahūn / tēnūn hadis khalq-i jahān kahūn // tēnūn muṭlak maḥz vujūd kahūn / tēnūn ‘almiyah-i a‘yān*

Regrettably, space does not allow here for the full explication that this *kāfi* deserves. Suffice it here to observe that the poem—and thus its singer and its audience—addresses itself to God by asking *how a Muslim* (poet, singer, and audience) *should conceive of God*. It explores this question by invoking a wide compass of concepts, values, references, and images that range from Avicennan philosophy (“Necessary,” “Contingent-Possible,” “Pre-Eternal Self-Essence”) and Neo-Platonic emanationism (“Highest Heaven,” “Celestial Spheres,” “Spirit,” “Matter,” “Vegetable,” “Animal,” “Human”), to Suhrawardian Illuminationism (“Beginning-Less Light”) to Akbarian intellectual Sufism (“Absolute Pure Existence,” “Becoming Known of the Originary Archetypes,” “Display of Attributes and Acts”), to the *madhhab-i ishq* (“Real-True Beauty,” “Beloved of Every Heart,” “Hourī,” “Fairy-Lass,” “Handsome Lad,” “Love,” “Sītā, my Darling One”), to the textbook questions of *kalām*-theology and philosophy (“Essence of the Reality of Quiddity,” “Species,” “Positions,” “Modes,” “Measures,” “Suspicion-Prehension,” “Conviction,” “Notion”), to Sufi experiential knowing (“Tasting,” “Rapture”), to music and aural sensation (*dholak*, “Tambour”; *tablā*, “metre,” “note-beat”), to the natural phenomena of the Seen World (“Water,” “Fire,” “Narcissus,” “Tulip”), to the narratives of Qur’ānic prophetology (Noah, Abraham, Muḥammad). The local Indian environment (both physical and cosmological) furnishes a meaningful vocabulary for the universal register of Akbarian/Suhrawardian exploration of the possibilities of pantheism and truth-relativism: “Shall I call you Pōthī, or shall I call you Qur’ān? Shall I call you Gita, Granth, or Veda?” The fundamental Akbarian question of the relationship between Divine Transcendence and Divine Immanence (*tashbih* and *tanzih*) is here couched in an Indic vocabu-

*kahūn // . . . tēnūn ‘ayn-i haķikat-i māhiyyat / tēnūn ‘arż-i şifat tē shān kahūn // anvā‘ kahūn awzā‘ kahūn / aṭwār kahūn awzān kahūn // tēnūn ‘arş kahūn aflak kahūn / tēnūn nāz na‘im janān kahūn // tēnūn tat jamād nabāt kahūn / ḥayvān kahūn insān kahūn // tēnūn masjid mandir dēr kahūn / tēnūn pōthī tē kūr‘ān kahūn // tasbih kahūn zunnār kahūn / tēnūn kufr kahūn īmān kahūn // tēnūn bādāl barkhā gāj kahūn / tēnūn bijli tē bārān kahūn // tēnūn āb kahūn tē khāk kahūn / tēnūn bād kahūn nīrān kahūn // tēnūn Dasrat Bichhman Rām kahūn / tēnūn Sītā-jī jānān kahūn // . . . Mahā Dēv kahūn Bhagvān kahūn // tēnūn Git Garanth tē Bēd kahūn . . . // . . . tēnūn Nūh kahūn tūfān kahūn // tēnūn Ibrāhim Khalil kahūn / tēnūn Muṣā bin Imrān kahūn . . . tēnūn Ahmad-i ‘alī-shāh kahūn // tēnūn har dil dā dildār kahūn / . . . / tēnūn hūr parī ghilmān kahūn // . . . tēnūn surkhī kajlāh pān kahūn / . . . tēnūn husn tē bār siṅgār kahūn / . . . tēnūn ṭablah tē tañbūr kahūn / tēnūn dholak sur tē tān kahūn // tēnūn ‘ishķ kahūn tēnūn ‘ilm kahūn / tēnūn vahm yaķīn gumān kahūn // tēnūn ḥiss quvāy-y idrāk kahūn / tēnūn zawk kahūn vujdān kahūn // tēnūn sakr kahūn sakrān kahūn / tēnūn hayrat tē hayrān kahūn / taslim kahūn talvin kahūn / tamkin kahūn ‘irfān kahūn // tēnūn sunbul sawsan sarv kahūn / tēnūn nargis-i nāfarmān kahūn // tēnūn lālah dāğh tē bāğh kahūn / gulzār kahūn bustān kahūn // . . . bē-rang kahūn bē-miśl kahūn / bē-ṣūrat har har ān kahūn; Khwājah Ghulām Farīd, *Divān-i Khwājah Farīd (ba-muṭābiķ kalamī nuskħah-hāy-‘e kadīm)* (edited by Khwājah Tāhir Maḥmūd Kōrijah), Lahore: Fayṣal, 2006, 374–378.*

lary as the question of the relationship between the Supreme Deity (Mahā Dev, Bhagwān) and specific deities (Dasrat, Bichhman, Rām).²²⁶

It is difficult, when confronted by this famous and widely-sung poem, to agree fully with the insistence of a most eminent of scholar of Sufism that “mystical folk poetry throughout the Islamic world has a strongly anti-intellectual bias.”²²⁷ Certainly, Sufi poetry is characterized by a privileging of knowing-by-the-heart over knowing-by-the-mind (and, certainly, the figure of the censorious, pettifogging mullah is a standard object of satire in the poetry of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex), but, as we can see from the above *kāfi*, Sufi knowing (especially in the post-Ibn ‘Arabī and post-Suhrawardī centuries) is itself informed by intellectual theorization. This *representative* poem, composed to be sung in the regional vernacular, hurls at Indus valley folk audiences attending its oral performance, in Sufi shrines and in other musical gatherings, a gamut of the critical concepts and technical terminology of philosophy, theology, and intellectual Sufism and does so as the means by which to pose to those audiences a subtle and profound question the exploration of which is reiterated in its every recitation and audition: namely, whether cognition of God is “Submission” to “Fixity,” or whether cognition of God is “Knowing-by-Self” of “Variegation”—and how the two modes relate in terms of *being Muslim*/in terms of *Islam*. As such, this poem demonstrates amply the acuity of Christopher Shackle’s characterization of “the throw-away art . . . of the most profound genre of the Panjabi Muslim lyric, the Sufi *kāfi*.²²⁸ It is the “throwaway-ness” of the *kāfi* that is precisely symptomatic of the social ubiquity and commonplace-ness of its *profound*-ness: we might say that the discourses of the society of the *kāfi* are littered with its profundities. Most people did/do not learn (or, at least, were/are not introduced to) the ideas and vocabulary of *wahdat al-wujūd* or *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* by studying directly the texts of Ibn ‘Arabī or Suhrawardi; rather they learn/ed these values, methods, and truth-claims from attendance of poetic-musical performances and from literary iteration.²²⁹ The *kāfi* serves precisely as the ready

²²⁶ Khwājah Ghulām Farīd’s Akbarianism is repeatedly attested in his *Dīvān*; for example: “Put aside Law, Theology and Creed! Be of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s people! [*iħaq fiqh iħsul ‘aqāyid nūn / rakh millat Ibn-ul-‘Arabī dīl*], *Dīvān-i Khwājah Farīd*, 205, see also 405.

²²⁷ Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2001, 139.

²²⁸ Christopher Shackle, “Between Scripture and Romance: The Yūsuf-Zulaikhā Story in Panjabī,” *South Asia Research* 15.2 (1995) 153–188, at 161.

²²⁹ For an overview of the poeticization of the conceptual vocabulary of *wahdat al-wujūd* across the Islamic world, see Haji Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, *The Ocean of Unity: Wahdat al-Wujūd in Persian, Turkish and Malay Poetry*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993; for a detailed study on its vernacularization in the Punjab, see ‘Ali ‘Abbās Jalālpūrī, *Vahdat-ul-vujūd tē Panjābī shā’irī*, Lahore: Panjābī Adabi Börd, 1977; for a series of important studies on the

means of circulation and mobilization of the ideas, values and norms of high intellectual culture for instruction, contemplation and criticism in society-at-large where, to reiterate Shahrani's felicitous phrase, "when this body of local Islamic knowledge and understanding is acquired and sustained through life-long exposure to elements of textual materials and the day-to-day interactions of the member of a community, it *becomes a part* of the individual Muslim practitioner."

This brings us nicely to a second pertinent socio-historical fact: namely, that education in and acquisition of the norms, ideas and values of the high culture of elites was an important component for upward social mobility—by fact of being elite norms they were desirable cultural capital which people sought to obtain for themselves. Thus, the main mechanism of social mobility in the Ottoman context, for example, was precisely the acquisition of the norms and values of the Ottoman social class through a shared education—to be an Ottoman, as noted above, was not to share an ethnicity, but rather a formative *paideia* and its constellation of language(s), norms and values. The proliferation down the centuries in the urban centers of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex of *madrasahs*—independently endowed and thus self-funding institutions of education—provided social access for a growing sector of the population to the educational means to this social mobility.²³⁰

Third, the vast majority of the population of pre-modern societies of Muslims participated in the normative truth-claims and vocabulary of the hierarchical cosmologies of Sufism by means of their oath-sworn-membership in, and fealty to, the truth-hierarchy of Sufi orders, and their participation in the weekly Sufi rituals that enacted these hierarchical cosmologies of differentiated truth: exemplarily, the *samā'*, or auditory communion with Real-Truth, and *ziyārah*, or visitation of saint-tombs to benefit from the cosmic economy of their *barakah* or spiritual power. The idea of the cosmic economy of *barakah* proceeds directly from the Neo-Platonic logic of emanation that underpins the Avicennan cosmos—indeed, an ordinary Muslim's *ziyārah* to obtain the *barakah* that emanates from the tomb of a Sufi in a village or mountain pass in Morocco, India or Indonesia is precisely a *de facto* acknowledgment of and active participation in a cosmos organized and structured and experienced in Neo-Platonic, Avicennan, and Akbarian terms.²³¹

shared vocabulary of elite and popular Turkish literary discourses including many elements of intellectual Sufism, see Cemal Kurnaz, *Halk ve Divan Şiirinin Müşterikleri Üzerine Denemeler*, Ankara: Akçağ, 1990; Cemal Kurnaz, *Türküden Gazele: Halk ve Divan Şiirinin Müşterikleri Üzerine Bir Deneme*, Ankara: Akçağ, 1997; and Cemal Kurnaz, *Halk Şiiri ve Divan Şiirinin Müşterikler*, Ankara: Gazi Kitabevi, 2005.

²³⁰ See Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire*.

²³¹ In this book, I am primarily treating in the circulation in societies of Muslims of ideas and

Finally, while we might imagine the pre-modern Muslim masses to have been scrupulous, puritan observers of legal norms (along the lines of proto-Salafis, or like a medieval vote-bank for the Muslim Brotherhood) we should remember that this is not at all how the pre-modern jurisprudential elites (whom too many of us are altogether too disposed to view as a medieval Muslim Brotherhood leadership) viewed them. Rather, these jurisprudential elites regarded the beliefs and practices of the majority of relatively uneducated and illiterate Muslims to be characterized by ignorance, misunderstanding and deviation from Islam, and thus in constant need of normative restoration by means of corrective elite intervention.²³² The primary instrument of this elite intervention was the prescriptive discourse of the law—which is a discourse *par excellence* of an educated, specialized scholarly elite. This historical reality is well exemplified in the *Book of Following the Straight Path* by the obstreperous thirteenth-century Damascene scholar and public intellectual, Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), which is a lengthy sermon dedicated to the identification and correction of a prolific list of popular malpractices and concomitant misbeliefs—not least, *samā'*, the visitation of tombs, and the observance by Muslims of Jewish and Christian customs—the profusion and variety of which are a vivid testimony to the historical failure of the Muslim commons to cleave to the jurist's straight and narrow path.²³³

norms originating amongst educated and cultural elites; however, I am not suggesting that the movement of norms and ideas has been unilaterally from “high” to “low” culture (or from Robert Redfield’s “Great Tradition” to “Little Traditions” where “Great” denotes urban elite culture, and “Little” denotes village folk culture; see Robert Redfield, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960)—rather, there is a dynamic of circulation in regard to which we, as historians and analysts, should keep our eyes open not only for “trickle down” but also for “trickle up,” and not only for “absorb in” but also for “diffuse out.” One of the most prodigious social sites of conceptual and praxial contact between elites and commons is Sufi tomb-shrines which were financially patronized by elites and frequented by both elites and commons seeking the *barakah* of the saint: a revealing instance of this is the shrine of Mu‘īnud-Dīn Chishtī at Ajmer to which various Muslim ruling dynasties of India have been especially devoted, and which is the locus of widespread popular veneration (see P. M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu‘īn al-Dīn Chishtī of Ajmer*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, 97–184).

²³² For a more detailed treatment of these themes in the context of a specific historical society of Muslims, that of the Ottomans, see Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire*.

²³³ See the excellent study by Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimiya's Struggle against Popular Religion with an Annotated Translation of the Kitāb iqtidā' aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat ashāb al-jahīm*, The Hague: Mouton, 1976. A study of the culture of shrines in eleventh- to sixteenth-century Syria is Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. An equally rich picture of a different time and place is presented in F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929; see now also H. T. Norris, *Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe: Sufi Brotherhoods and the Dialogue with Christianity and “Heterodoxy”*, London: Routledge, 2006. On the debate over the legal status of tomb visitation, see Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999.

The development in modern scholarship of Sufism as a compartmentalized or specialized “field” of scholarly study, and its relative neglect by non-specialists, has led to the tendency toward a compartmentalized and specialized view of the history of societies of Muslims in which Sufism is treated as a compartmentalized or specialized activity by Muslims—rather than as seen as an integral and integrated element in the lives of Muslims. As such, even while scholars of Islamic history recognize Sufism as a socially-prolific phenomenon, there is widespread non-recognition of the normativity in historical societies of Muslims of the truth-claims of Sufi discourse. Rather than being regarded as normative and representative, Sufism is seen as alternative and particular. One symptom of this is the fact that when scholars speak of the relationship between Sufism and law in societies of Muslim in terms of “contestation” (as they often do),²³⁴ many of them tend reflexively to assume and present a historical picture in which it is Sufism alone that is the contested discourse, and that is necessarily on the defensive against the authority of the law. In the normative picture presented by historians, it is Sufism that is in the dock and it is the discourse of the law that is invariably the ultimate judge and juror. In contrast, the foregoing presentation of Sufi discourses shows a historical picture where the practitioners of Sufi epistemology are making “normative” and “authoritative” claims that contest, undermine and put on the defensive legal epistemology and discourse.

The social actualization of these claims is nicely illustrated in the following description by a historian of Sufism of the society of the town of Zabid in fourteenth-century Yemen where the anthropocosmic/cosmoanthropic theory of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), abstracted and eternalized in the essence-ideal of the Muhammadan Real-Truth (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyah*), was published in a scholarly treatise by ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili. In a milieu permeated by the social and imaginal structures of Sufism, al-Jili applied the concept to his own living Sufi master, a gentleman of Eritrean extraction by the name of Ismā‘il al-Jabarti (d. 1403):

In discussing the central topic of his work, the manifestation of the essence of Muhammad in the personality of the Perfect Man of the age, al-Jili wrote “... I encountered him in the form of my master Sharaf al-din Ismā‘il al-Jabarti” ...

The lack of a clear-cut boundary between abstract metaphysical separation and personal mystical experience ... characterizes Ibn ‘Arabi’s entire worldview ...

²³⁴ See Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (editors), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999.

al-Jili . . . drew no sharp line between the Perfect Man as an abstract manifestation of the universal *al-haqīqa al-muhammadīya*, and its quite concrete embodiment in the personality of his Yemeni master . . . Since al-Jili was one of the most well-educated mystical thinkers of his age, one cannot even fathom what exuberant forms the veneration of al-Jabartī should have assumed among his less sophisticated followers . . . Emboldened by the sultan's support, the Sufis of Zabid began to openly defy their detractors among the *fugahā'*, who continually attacked the noisy Sufi gatherings in the mosques that were accompanied with much drumbeat, singing and dancing. Ecstatic behaviour was not uncommon among the participants . . . Such scandalous goings-on in the city mosques alarmed many '*ulama'*, who felt they were losing ground to al-Jabartī's followers. Yet with the sultan's sympathy squarely on the latter's side, the '*ulama'* had to toe a fine line.²³⁵

Here we have a historical situation where definitive and emblematic ideas of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam, namely the concepts of the Muhammadian Real-Truth and Perfect Man, are mobilized and asserted as a normative value against and above the values of the law at all levels of society—from the sultan to common people participating in Sufi rituals—and where the proponents of legal values find themselves deferring to this normative claim, not least because the claim is subscribed to by the ruling institutions and social strata of the state itself. This is not at all an uncommon historical scenario in the history of societies of Muslims.²³⁶

The assertion of non-legal values as *norms* is straightforwardly presented in the “Dispute Between Love and Law [*'ishk shara' dā jhagarā*],” a *kāfi* at-

²³⁵ Knysh, *Ibn Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 251–252.

²³⁶ For a study of two important cases of unsuccessful attempts by prominent members of the '*ulama'* at legally proscribing practices and discourses of Sufi knowing in Mamlük Cairo, see Th. Emil Homerin, “Sufis and their Detractors in Mamluk Cairo: A Survey of the Protagonists and Institutional Settings,” in de Jong and Radtke, *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 225–247. For the case of a scholar who was judicially executed in Ottoman Damascus for calling Ibn 'Arabī a heretic nearly 250 years after the latter's death, see Éric Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: Orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturelles*, Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1995, 134. For a schematic sense of the historical recognition by ruling elites of the factual reality of the veridical power of living Sufi *shaykhs* and the social and political consequences thereof, see the studies by Simon Digby, “The Sufi *Shaykh* and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India,” *Iran* 28 (1990) 71–81; and Simon Digby, “The Sufi *Shaykh* as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India,” *Puruṣārtha* 4 (1986) 55–77. See also the remarkable latitude and discursive space allowed to the political maverick and doctrinal eccentric Ottoman Sufi Niyāzī Miṣrī, analyzed in Terzioglu, “Sufi and Dissident in the Ottoman Empire.” Many more examples could be cited.

tributed to (but probably not actually authored by) the most widely sung Sufi poet of the Panjab, Bullhē Shāh of Ḳaṣūr (1680–1758), in which

- Law says, “Go to the *Mullā* and learn the rules and regulations!”
- Love says, “A single word is enough: shut and put away all other books!” . . .
- Law says, “Have some shame and decency: put out this light!”
- Love says, “What is this veil for? Let the visions be open!”
- Law says, “Come into the mosque and perform the obligatory prayer!”
- Love says, “Go to the wine-tavern, and having drunk, perform the supererogatory prayer!” . . .
- Law says, “O, Believer! go for Hajj—for you will have to cross the *Şirāt Bridge!*²³⁷
- Love says, “The door of the Beloved is the Ka‘bah, don’t move from there!”
- Law says, “We strung Shāh Manṣūr up on the cross!”
- Love says, “Then, you did well; for you sacrificed him at the Beloved’s door!”²³⁸

The scholar, Lajwanti Rama Krishna, writing in 1938, notes revealingly that “this *kāfi* was kindly given to me by the late Mīrāsī [that is, *musician* and *singer*] Maula Bakhsh of Lahore.”²³⁹

Once more, we can see in the text and performance of this *kāfi* (and in its popular attribution to the most recited Sufi poet of the language of 100 million Muslims) the confident assertion and widespread social circulation of the self-confident *norms* of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam posited opposite and above the norms of the law. While the existence of what are generally called “anti-nomian Sufi” trajectories in the history of Islam is recognized, the analytical tendency is to view such “anti-nomianism” as *anti*-normative and thus as non-representative of Islamic norms. I suggest that to obtain a better sense of the dimensions and complexities of the social and discursive phenomenon

²³⁷ This is the bridge over the fires of Hell, of the width of a hair.

²³⁸ *shara'* kahē chal pās *mullā* dē sikkh lay adab adābān nūn / 'ishk kahē ikkē harf bathērā thapp rakhh hōr kitābān nūn // . . . *shara'* kahē kujh sharam ḥayā kar band kar is chamkārē nūn / 'ishk kahē ēh guṅghat kaysā khullan dē nazzārē nūn // *shara'* kahē chal masjid andar ḥakk namāz adā kar lay / 'ishk kahē chal maykhānē vichch pīkē sharāb naṣal paṛh lay // . . . *shara'* kahē chal ḥajj kar mōman pul-sarāt laṅgānā rē / *ishk* kahē bū'ā yār da ka'bah utththō mūl nā hilnā rē // *shara'* kahē Shāh Manṣūr nūn sūlī ut्ते chāriyā sī / 'ishk kahē tusā chaṅgā kitā bū-ē yār dē vāriyā sī, cited in Lajwanti Rama Krishna, *Panjabī Sūfi Poets*, London: Oxford University Press, 1938, 65–66 (I have occasionally emended both Rama Krishna’s translation and transliteration).

²³⁹ Rama Krishna, *Panjabī Sūfi Poets*, 66.

at stake here, we should conceive of the self-conception of these trajectories not as *anti-nomian*—*against* the law, but as *para-nomian*—that is, *beside* the law, or as *supra-nomian*—that is, *above* the law. What emerges clearly from the foregoing poem is a social reality of a plurality of norms (and proponents of those norms) disputing with each other over what it means to be Muslim—arguing over “what is Islam?” It would be a symptom of analytical good health were modern scholars of Islam reflexively to conceive of historical societies of Muslims as discursive fora in which, at the center of life, the epistemological authority of the law is continually “contested” and negotiated by the epistemologies of Sufism and philosophy in the thinking and consciousness of Muslims.

And lest it be argued that my characterization of the foregoing ideas and behaviours—which run directly counter to Islamic legal norms—as normative to Islam is somehow like arguing for the normativity to Islam of murder, theft and adultery (since these were also presumably common enough practices in societies of Muslims which run directly counter to Islamic legal norms), it should be emphasized that there is a fundamental distinction between these two sets of legally-transgressive practices: namely, that Muslims never valorized murder, theft and adultery (or, for that matter, eating pork) as *positive* and *meaningful* acts that in any way approximated or expressed the meaning of Divine Truth, whereas this was precisely the claim made in regard to para-nomian or supra-nomian philosophical and Sufi thought, as well as to wine-drinking and figural painting.



The foregoing discussion has presented a historical scenario of significant societies of Muslims who *thought* and *lived* in a manner that destabilizes any reflexive conceptualization we might have of Islam having been constituted by the overweening or unmediated supremacy of those sources of Revealed Truth that we moderns are intellectually conditioned to regard as primary: the Qur’ān, Hadith or Islamic law (to which common conceptualization I will return in Chapter 2, below). We have seen, rather, that Islamic philosophy *subordinates* the *Qur’ān* to the supremacy of reason—which is to say not merely that the *text* of the *Qur’ān* is read rationally; rather, the *concept* of the *Qur’ān* as the text of divine revelation is constructed and read subject to the demands of a total Truth-matrix elaborated by reason in which reason/philosophy is the higher truth and the text of revelation the lower. Simply, not enough emphasis is placed on the recognition of this fact when thinking about the human and historical phenomenon of Islam—although it is what

Michael Marmura is grasping at when he says of the philosophers' concept of Islam, "In the final analysis, it is religion that must accommodate itself to philosophy and not the other way around";²⁴⁰ and is also what Peter Heath is alluding to when he says of the philosophers' hermeneutics of the Qur'ān, "Here the *Qur'ān* has lost its position of textual privilege."²⁴¹ Yet, when Heath goes on to say that the philosophers' "hermeneutic approach remained a minority opinion . . . even among the intellectual elite," he is committing a near-universal error amongst scholars of Islam of omitting to consider the translation, transposition and circulation of the orientating concepts of philosophy into the formulation of theology, into Sufism, into cosmology, into fundamental conceptualizations of the nature of the human being—and thus into the *larger modes of thinking and hermeneutics of Islam* that is the self-expressive poetical and narrative tradition of the literary canon of the Balkans-to Bengal complex.

As with philosophy, it is not merely that Sufism reads the text of the Qur'ān esoterically: rather, Sufism *subjects the concept* of the Qur'ān to the demands of a total Truth-matrix elaborated by gnostic discipline and experience wherein experiential *haqiqah* is the higher truth, and prescriptive *shari'ah* the lower truth. The respective projects of Suhrawardian Philosophy of Illumination and the Akbarian Unity of Existence both read the Qur'ān (and, in the latter case, also the Hadith) in a manner in which the text of the revelation is made subject to the demands of a cosmology so apparently counter-intuitive to the text as to make the meaning of the text of the Qur'ān appear dependent on that cosmology—rather than that cosmology dependent on the text of the Qur'ān. It is not that this hermeneutic ignores Divine and Prophetic texts, but rather that it *appropriates* them by reading them against the apparent Divine grain—the *locus classicus* being Ibn 'Arabi's exegesis of the Qur'ānic narrative of the idols of Noah's people.

Similarly, the poetical and narrative fiction texts—such as the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ—which we are conditioned to think of as *not* constructive of normative Islam also actively engage with and make normative claims by their own hermeneutical engagement with the phenomenon and language of Muḥammadan Revelation: Hāfiẓ is (like Muḥammad) the "Tongue of the Unseen," his *Dīvān* is the image of the Qur'ān, his book is a source of prophecy. The social institutionalization of figural painting and wine-drinking must then be un-

²⁴⁰ Marmura, "The Islamic Philosophers' Conception of Islam," 97.

²⁴¹ Heath, "Creative Hermeneutics," 193. Heath's excellent article compares the ways in which the Qur'ān was read in different "hermeneutical methods" respectively by "the historian and Qur'ānic commentator, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224/838–310/922); the philosopher, Abū 'Alī Ḥusain ibn Sinā (Avicenna, 370/980–428/1037); and the mystic Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī (560/1165–638/1240)."

derstood as the conceptual and practical subordination of the normative value-rulings of the hermeneutic of Islamic law to the normative value-rulings of these *other* hermeneutics: other hermeneutics that allow for the enactment on earth of God's order to be symbolized on the coin of the realm by a wine-cup clasped in the hand of God's Vicegerent on Earth. There would appear, indeed, to be much to recommend Giorgio Levi Della Vida's pungent remark, "The *Leitmotiv* of the religious history of Islam is the desperate attempt to get rid of the rigid literalism of the Koran."²⁴² But Levi Della Vida is off-target in attributing literalism to the *text* of the Qur'an: rather, it is more accurate to say that the history of Islam is characterized by the development of a range of complex hermeneutical apparatuses and trajectories whereby more-or-less literal modes of reading have developed, emerged, and presented themselves in social and intellectual array to be taken up by Muslims as means and terms of engagement with the Truth(s) of revelation. For it is important to note that the range of hermeneutical opportunities and their contrary constructions of Islam described above were socially alive and active: they presented themselves constantly to Muslims in the people they met, the texts they read, the practices they enacted, and the ideas they encountered from those people and texts and practices. The historical challenge for Muslims has been in engaging relationally—that is *inter-textually and inter-epistemologically*—with themselves and each other across this hermeneutical array. Thus the great Ibn Rushd / Averroës (1126–1198) was, on the one hand, the Chief Judge of Cordoba administering the Revealed law, and on the other hand, a philosopher writing on the hierarchy of T/truth (where law, as we have seen, ranked down the scale); the Istanbuli intellectual Kātib Çelebī called himself a Ḥanafī by legal *madhhab* but an *ishrāqī* (that is, Suhrawardian Illuminationist) by disposition (*mashrab*),²⁴³ while the *nonpareil* nineteenth-century Urdu and Persian poet of Delhi, Mirzā Asad-Allāh Khān "Ghālib" (1797–1869, who stands in canonical relation to Urdu literature as does Shakespeare to English) proclaimed with blithe irony:

These, the conundra of Sufism; and these—O! Ghālib—your solutions for them;
 We would have acknowledged you a saint —were it not for your
 wine-drinking!²⁴⁴

²⁴² G. Levi Della Vida, "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Islamic Culture," *Crozer Quarterly* 21 (1944) 207–216, at 212.

²⁴³ Adnan Adıvar, *Osmalı Türklerinde İlim*, Istanbul: Maarif Matbasi, 1943, 118 (citing a manuscript of Kātib Çelebī's autobiography, the *Sullam al-wuṣūl*).

²⁴⁴ *yih masā'il-i taṣavvuf yih tērā bayān Ghālib / tujhē ham valī samajhtē jō nah bādahkhwār*

Ghālib's irony in this couplet (which is appreciated by the audience of his peers) is, of course, directed at those who are unable to reconcile the apparent contradiction of his capacity (on the one hand) to resolve the conundrum of Sufism in the genius of his verse—something that only a *valī* (a friend of God, a “saint”) should be able to do—while (on the other hand) being a notorious wine-drinker. Ghālib’s point is that there is no real contradiction here—something that had been bluntly stated by Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī himself six centuries earlier, when he was asked about the wine-drinking of his beloved Shams-i Tabrīz:

One day the jealous jurists, out of stubbornness and denial, asked Mawlānā whether wine is permitted [*halāl*] or forbidden [*harām*]. They were targeting the pure honour of Shams al-Dīn. Mawlānā answered with a metaphor, saying, “It depends on who drinks it. For, if a wine-skin is poured into the river, the river remains unchanged and will not be polluted—and it is permitted to perform ablutions for prayer with that water, and to drink it. But in the case of a small basin, even a drop of wine will certainly render it impure. In the same way, whatever falls into the salty sea is overcome by the rule of salt. The straightforward answer is that if Mawlānā Shams al-Dīn drinks it, for him everything is permitted [*mubāh*], since the rule of the river applies. Whereas, if it is someone like you—your sister’s a whore!—even barley bread is forbidden [*harām*].”²⁴⁵

Rūmī’s point (and I ask the reader to forgive Our Sovereign Master’s tendency to the occasional expletive when asserting his arguments) is that there

hötä, Mīrzā Asad-Allāh Khān Ghālib, *Dīvān-i Ghālib* (edited by Imtiyāz ‘Alī Khān ‘Arshī), (2nd edition), Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1992, 2:187.

²⁴⁵ *rūzi fuqahā-yi hussād az sar-i inkār va ‘inād az hazrat-i Mawlānā su’al kardan kih sharāb ḥalāl-ast yā harām va gharaż-i išhān ‘irż-i pāk-i Shams-ud-Dīn būzah bi-kināyat javāb farmūz kih tā kih khwuraz chih agar mashkī sharāb rā dar daryā rizand mutaghayyir na-shavaz va ū-rā mugaddar nagardānāz va az ān āb vužū’ sākhtan va khwurdan jāyiz bāshaz ammā ḥawzaki kūchak-rā qatrah-’i sharāb bīgumān kih najaṣ kunaz va hamchunān har-chih dar bahr-i-namaklān uftaz ḥukm-i namak gīraz va javāb-i ṣarīḥ [reading ṣarīḥ for ṣarīkh] ān ast kih agar Mawlānā Shams-ud-Dīn mīnūshaz ū rā hamih chīzhā mubāh ast kih ḥukm-i daryā dāraz va agar chwun tu ghar khwāhari kunaz nān-i juvinat ham harām ast, Shams al-Dīn Ahmad al-Aflāki al-‘Ārifī, *Manāqib-i ‘ārifīn* (edited by Tahsin Yazıcı), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1959, 2:639–640. Compare the translation in Shams al-Dīn Ahmad-e Aflāki, *The Feasts of the Knowers of God* (translated by John O’Kane), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002, 441; and in Jawid Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma: Rumi’s Teachings on Friendship with God and Early Sufi Theories*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 91. For the famous story where Shams-i Tabrīz rejects the application of the Sufi poet, Shaykh Awħad al-Dīn (d. 1298), to be his disciple because Awħad al-Dīn will not drink wine with him, see al-Aflāki, *Manāqib-i ‘ārifīn*, 2:617–618, translated by O’Kane in Aflāki, *The Feasts of the Knowers of God*, 423–424.*

is a hierarchy of truth and of the knowers of truth whereby the claims to universal authority of the legal discourse of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* simply do not apply *universally*: the value-rule of the small basin does not apply to the flowing river. In Rūmī’s conception, two opposite truths obtain here at the same time in spatial and social differentiation—and both are Islam: for Rūmī, and for all those who invoke him as “Mawlānā,” Shams-i Tabrīz (who is, effectively, Rūmī’s “Mawlānā”) is certainly no less a Muslim than is the jealous jurist.



It is in such vivid and intimate terms as the foregoing *personal engagements with the contradictory possibilities of truth and meaning* that we must try to understand what Alexander Knysh has (with an awareness all too rarely in evidence both in modern Western scholarship and in the discourses of modern Muslims) rightly called “the dazzling diversity of Muslim religious life . . . the intrinsic pluralism and complexity characteristic of the religious life of the Muslim community” where “disparate ideas and concepts, bits and pieces of creeds and doctrines circulated freely and were thus easily available to individual believers who patched them into a ragtag whole of *Weltanschauung*”²⁴⁶—although I prefer the image of a rich, complex, but coherently patterned carpet to that of a rag-tag patchwork.

Whether we characterize the making of a Muslim’s *Weltanschauung* as an act of patching, weaving, or knotting, the point is that *islām* is, of course, in the first semantic instance, *action and activity* by the individual human being. The word *islām*, as straightforwardly stated in the quotation from the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* cited at the outset of this chapter, is the *maṣdar*—that is, a verbal noun, or noun of action—“of the IVth form of the root *S L M*,”²⁴⁷ which connotes “to submit” or “to surrender.” Islam is thus, in the first semantic instance, an *action*: it is something a person *does*, and it is by doing *islām* that a person makes himself or herself, in terms of that act—or, more properly, array of acts; including, of course, thought-acts—a Muslim.²⁴⁸

We have seen in our treatment of the foregoing six diagnostic questions, as well as in the sundry examples presented above, that the history of Islam

²⁴⁶ Alexander Knysh, “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Heresy’ in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment,” *Muslim World* 83 (1993) 48–67, at 57, and 62.

²⁴⁷ Gardet, “Islām,” 171.

²⁴⁸ The scholar who has sought most actively to draw our attention to the significance of this fact is Wilfred Cantwell Smith: “‘*Islām*’ . . . is a verbal noun: the name of an action, not of an institution: of a personal decision, not a social system,” Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 112.

in its most mature, expansive, and powerful phase has been dominated by societies in which Muslims made themselves Muslims, thought of themselves as Muslims, and lived as Muslims in quite contrary ways. In other words, these Muslims made Islam, thought Islam, and lived Islam in quite contrary ways. These were societies in which Muslims who took *hikmat al-ishrāq* and *wahdat al-wujūd* as the means to the meaning of Divine Truth, and Muslims who condemned *hikmat al-ishrāq* and *wahdat al-wujūd* as rank heresy; Muslims for whom to be a Sufi was to subordinate the *shari‘ah* to the *haqīqah* and Muslims for whom to be a Sufi was to subordinate the *haqīqah* to the *shari‘ah*; Muslims who prohibited the consumption of wine and the production of figural images, and Muslims who celebrated both the consumption of wine and the production of figural images, lived face-to-face and side-by-side. The foregoing examples of contradiction are all instances of workings-out—and, indeed, workings-in—of the act of *islām*: that is, of articulating the act, state, condition and *meaning* of being Muslim. Clearly, simply honing in on the dictionary definition “of the IVth form of the root *S L M*”—namely, submission to God—does not in and of itself get us very far in helping us to conceptualize this contradictory range of articulated meanings and self-constitutions as Islam.²⁴⁹

But even as we attend to the (often neglected) fact that the object-phenomenon “Islam” we are seeking to conceptualize is, in the first instance, action by the individual human subject and agent, we must also recognize that Islam is also something that exists beyond and outside the individual human agent as an external and extra-personal phenomenon. Out there in the world beyond the individual Muslim is something that this Muslim recog-

²⁴⁹ Neither is it entirely clear that the early seventh-century West Arabian community into which Muhammad proclaimed the Qur‘ān themselves understood Islam to mean “submission”: the formidable Semitic philologist, M. M. Bravmann, argued on the basis of pre- and early Islamic Arabic literary sources that “the original sense of the term as a designation for the religion of Muhammad is ‘defiance of death, self-sacrifice (for the sake of God and his prophet),’ or ‘readiness for defiance of death,’” M. M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam: Studies in Ancient Arab Concepts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972, 8; while D. Z. H. Baneth proposed that *islām* was understood in the sense of “to devote [or be devoted exclusively] to” and thus originally connoted “the unimpaired monotheism of the [Hebrew] prophets” as opposed to “the polytheism of the Meccans,” D.Z.H. Baneth, “What did Muhammad Mean When He Called His Religion ‘Islam?’” *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1975) 183–190, at 188–189. Fred M. Donner has argued that “as used in the Qur‘ān . . . *islam* and *muslim* do not yet have the sense of confessional distinctness that we now associate with ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’; they meant something broader and more inclusive and were sometimes applied to some Christians and Jews,” and that Muhammad initially founded a broader Community of Believers (*mu‘minūn*) which only over the course of the century after his death “evolved into the religion we now know as Islam through a process of refinement and redefinition of its basic concepts,” Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, 71, 194–195.

nizes as Islam, and to do *islām*—to make him/herself a Muslim—the individual must engage with that received external something that s/he recognizes as Islam. This Islam-beyond-the-individual is reposed in the variegated discourses and practices of the Community of Muslims (*ummah al-muslimīn*)—and by identifying him/herself as a Muslim, and by engaging with this external Islam when making his/her internal *islām*, the individual Muslim is also establishing a more-or-less negotiated relationship of his/her *communal* identity and his/her belonging with the Muslim *ummah*.

In a yet further, third, dynamic, Islam-beyond-the-individual or Islam-in-the-*ummah* is, of course, precisely the cumulative, variegated, integrated and differentiated product of the *islām*-acts of innumerable Muslim individuals. In the process of making himself/herself Muslim, the individual makes a discursive and praxial statement of *islām* that is that individual's answer to the question "What is Islam?"—an answer that partially or wholly conforms to or dissents from some previous answer that is available "out there." With that interpretative action and statement of endorsement or disagreement the individual Muslim adds to the admixture of variegation-integration-differentiation that is out there as "Islam." Simply put, in making him/herself Muslim, the individual Muslim is not just making *islām* but is also making Islam.

All of these three elements—namely, personal Islam, the elaboration of the discursive and praxial content of Islam, and the identification with the community of Islam—are *co-constitutive* of the human and historical phenomenon of Islam. In seeking to conceptualize Islam we must, therefore, come to conceptual terms with the structural relationship and processual dynamic between personal acts of *islām*, the assembly of these individual acts in the community of Islam, and the diverse elaborations by individuals and communities of the content and meaning of Islam.²⁵⁰



I stated at the outset that to conceptualize any theoretical object is necessarily an attempt at identifying a general rule to which all phenomena that affiliate

²⁵⁰ The difficult nature of our analytical task is indicated in Jane I. Smith's observation in her valuable study of the history of the meaning of the word *islām* in Qur'ānic exegetical literature, "In reality any attempt to distinguish between the communal and the personal aspects of this term, between Islam and *islām*, will be inadequate unless it takes into account the very fact that for the Muslim they have been traditionally indistinguishable . . . Islam originally meant at once the personal relationship between man and God and the community of those acknowledging this relationship," Jane I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam' as Seen in a Sequence of Qur'ān Commentaries*, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975, 1–2.

themselves with that object somehow cohere. As Henri Lefebvre said in addressing another capacious and elusive concept:

For mental and social to be reconnected, they first have to be clearly distinguished from one another, and the mediations between them re-established. *The concept of space is not in space.* Likewise the concept of time is not a time within time. Of this the philosophers have long been aware. The content of the concept of space is not absolute space or space-in-itself; nor does the concept contain a space within itself . . . Rather, the concept of space denotes and connotes all possible spaces, whether abstract or “real,” mental or social.²⁵¹

Similarly, a valid concept of “Islam” must denote and connote all possible “Islams,” whether abstract or “real,” mental or social.²⁵² And while, in this book, I have deliberately chosen the bulk of my historical examples from the demographic and intellectual center of the societies and discourses of demographically major Sunnī Islam, rather than from the societies and discourses of demographically minor Shī‘ī Islam or from smaller sects and movements, I have done this simply for the pragmatic reason that I do not want to facilitate the facile objection that I am conceptualizing Islam on the basis of marginal or non-representative phenomena. In principle, however, adducing non-Sunnī historical examples is no way antithetical to my project since my basic point is that a valid conceptualization of “Islam” must denote and connote all possible “Islams.”

Such a conceptualization seems to inform the other quotation cited at the outset of this chapter—which is the statement with which the ninth-/tenth-century eponymous founder of the largest theological school of thought in Islamic history, Abū al-Hasan al-Ash‘arī, prefaced the book that he entitled *The Professions of the Islamic People (al-islāmiyyīn), and the Disagreements among Those Who Perform the Prayer*: “After their Prophet, the people disagree about many things; some of them led others astray, while some dissociated themselves from others. Thus, they became distinct groups and disparate parties—except that Islam [al-islām] gathers them together and encompasses

²⁵¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 (translated from the French by David Nicholson-Smith, first published as *La production de l'espace*, Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1974), 299.

²⁵² As Reza Pirbhai says, “Unless a value judgement is imposed on such multiplicity, essentialising one or another Path or Way as ‘orthodox,’ any valid conception of doctrinal Islam must include them all and their particular brands of hostility and hospitality,” M. Reza Pirbhai, *Reconsidering Islam in a South Asian Context*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009, 338.

them all.”²⁵³ Al-Ash‘arī’s monograph contains a detailed account of the prodigious range of often radical creedal differences that obtained in his day (some three centuries after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad) amongst those whom he calls *Islāmiyyīn*—literally, “the Islamic persons,” a plural noun of ascription, affiliation, association, or attribution that denotes “those affiliated/associated with, or ascribed/attributed to Islam.” While, regrettably, al-Ash‘arī does not spell out for us how he is here constituting the term, he clearly conceived of the object-phenomenon *Islam* as the rule and category that, in spite of the catalogue of disagreements and differences among the *Islāmiyyūn*, “gathers them together” and “encompasses them all.”

The six questions that I have raised in this chapter, similarly, all contain what al-Ash‘arī calls *Professions of the Islamic People*: that is to say that they all contain statements of what it meant to various historical groups of people to *be Muslim*, each of which statements is a response to the question “What is Islam?”²⁵⁴ The six questions also reveal disagreement among *Islāmiyyūn*/Islamic persons—since each of these statements of *being Muslim* is the object of disagreement by other Muslims. I have raised these specific examples because they are particularly thorny instances of disagreement: thorny not only because they are instances of outright contradiction, but also because they are socially prodigious and intellectually central to the history of societies of Muslims, and thus must be accounted for in the conceptualization and definition of Islam and the Islamic.

These thorny questions enable us clearly to see the extent to which human and historical Islam is a rich complex of often contradictory truth-claims put forward by various proponents, all of whom have, nonetheless, to their own satisfaction made sense of themselves as Muslims—meaning that all have made sense of their own truth claims *as Islam*—some of whom/which have been able also to make sense of all or many *other* of those claims *as Islam*, and most of whom/which have managed, for most of the time, to co-exist with each other despite these contradictions. It is this range of differences between those societies, persons, ideas, and practices that identify themselves with

²⁵³ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, 34.

²⁵⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith once wrote that “the fundamental rewarding task would be to make a study of the history of the word ‘Islām’: to discover the evolution of its usage and meaning over the centuries and the variety of connotations that it has evinced in the course of its historical development.” However, and as Smith might agree, the history of Muslims’ conceptualizations of Islam is not exhausted by the history of stated definitions of the word, but encompasses the history of the full gamut of actions and self-expressions of Muslims acting as Muslims (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “The Historical Development in Islam of the Concept of Islam as an Historical Development,” in Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (editors), *Historians of the Middle East*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, 484–502, at 487).

Islam that poses the fundamental analytical challenge to attempts at conceptualizing Islam/Islamic.

It is also precisely this range of differences between Muslims' answers to the question "What is Islam?" that requires us to come up with a conceptualization of Islam that goes beyond that offered by any one party of Muslims—and that encompasses precisely the variety of statements of being Muslim/*islām*/Islam that are in evidence across the foregoing questions.²⁵⁵ Anthropologists are wont to distinguish between "emic" accounts (that is, accounts of acts that are meaningful to and expressed in terms used by the actors themselves) and "etic" accounts (that is, accounts that are meaningful to and expressed in terms used by anthropologists themselves). Similarly, a scholar of Islamic philosophy has distinguished between "actors' categories: that is the conceptual scheme in use among the historical protagonists themselves" and "historians' categories" which are the conceptual schemes produced by historians as analysts.²⁵⁶

In the present instance, though, we stand in need of a etic/historians' category that is external to Muslims' categorizations of Islam, in so far as it is not the same as any one such categorization (since some Muslims' conceptualizations of Islam differ from others) but that also coherently comprises and expresses the relationship of all emic/actors' categories to the larger category at stake (and thus to each other)—which is the category and phenomenon "Islam" with which all actors identify and affiliate their actions and themselves. In other words, to answer the question "What is Islam?" we really stand in need of an etic/historians' conceptualization of Islam that also functions satisfactorily as a "pan-emic" conceptualization in spite of—indeed, *because of*—the disagreements of Muslim actors.

Implicit in my project is the conviction that it is important to have an accurate and meaningful conceptualization of Islam as a human and historical

²⁵⁵ As Mark Woodward straightforwardly points out, "Among the most controversial issues at stake for both Muslims and detached scholars is the seemingly simple question 'What is Islam?' For detached scholars trained in the social sciences and humanities, the question concerns the historical and textual roots of systems of belief, practice, and discourse; for the ethnographer the question concerns what Muslims consider to be properly understood as Islamic. Difficulties arise because professed Muslims differ sharply on what Islam is, and are often inclined to refer to their theological opponents as unbelievers," Mark R. Woodward, "Talking Across Paradigms: Indonesia, Islam and Orientalism," in Mark R. Woodward (editor), *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Thought*, Tempe: Arizona State University Program for Southeast Asian Studies, 1996, 1–45, at 7. The contemporary ethnographer Woodward is, however, somewhat overstating the historical case when he says that Muslims are "*often* inclined to refer to their theological opponents as unbelievers" (italics mine)—on the whole there has been a remarkable disinclination to *takfir* or anathemization in the history of societies of Muslims.

²⁵⁶ Wisnovsky, "Islam," 704.

phenomenon because *it matters how we use the word “Islamic”* to identify, designate, characterize and constitute given phenomena. How and when we use the word “Islamic” is important because the act of naming is a *meaningful* act: the act of naming is an act of identification, designation, characterization, constitution, and valorization. In saying that something is Islamic we are necessarily identifying, designating, constituting and valorizing that thing in terms of a *norm* that we believe we “know” to be Islam, or as a *value* that we assay on the basis of what we regard as sound method and criteria to be Islam. To constitute something as “Islamic” is thus necessarily an act of authorization, legitimation and inclusion: we are *authorizing* and *legitimating* that Islamic thing as being constituted by the *normative value* “Islam,” and are *including* it with other things that we are similarly authorizing and legitimating in normative terms.

By the same token, how we use the word “Islamic” is also an act of *de*-authorization and *de-legitimation*: simply, by not labeling something “Islamic” (or by the stronger act of labeling it un-Islamic) we are *excluding* that thing from being representative of the normative value “Islam.” While the significance of this act of naming is especially evident today in the fraught (and sometimes violent) disagreement among Muslims over what it is that constitutes the Islamic—whether Islamic state, Islamic law, Islamic finance, Islamic status of women, or whether over who is and is not a Muslim—the *political* nature of the act of naming is certainly not confined to Muslims’ uses of “Islamic.” Rather, the politics of authorization/*de*-authorization, of legitimation/*de*-legitimation, of inclusion/exclusion, and of *norm-construction* are very much operational in the ostensibly detached and putatively aseptic analytic discourse of the North American and European dominated international academy whose humanities and social sciences project it is to conceptualize, analyze and valorize people and phenomena in the world.

It is considerably the power of the discourse of the Euro-American academy that provides what Robert Orsi has called “the disciplinary vocabulary of modernity . . . a disciplinary nomenclature that tells us how the world *must be* or as some part of the world’s populations wants and insists it to be,”²⁵⁷—which is the vocabulary by which we “Westernized” moderns speak about

²⁵⁷ Robert A. Orsi, “The Disciplinary Vocabulary of Modernity,” *International Journal* (Autumn 2004) 879–885; similarly Frédéric Volpi has spoken of how “in a Foucauldian vein . . . social science narratives about ‘political Islam’ do not so much produce a knowledge of the subject as illustrate the epistemic power of various disciplines to shape the academic, policy and media framings of social phenomena . . . the power to name what ‘is,’” Volpi, *Political Islam Observed*, 198–199. In a way, all this is no more than than the extension of what Edward Said so momentously taught us with regard to the concept and name “Orient” in Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

and valorize the people and phenomena around us (and I am no less implicated in this vocabulary than is anyone else). In using the term “*Islamic*” we, modern Muslims and non-Muslims alike, are engaging in an act of ordering the world and making it *meaningful for ourselves* in terms of what we believe we know Islam to be.

Now, each of the statements of *being Muslim* embedded in the foregoing six questions puts forward a historically major answer by self-professed Muslims to the question “What is Islam?” that poses severe difficulties for the coherence of our ordering of the world in terms of Islam, and of Islam in terms of the world—and thus poses difficulties for our efforts at making Islam and the world meaningful and coherent for ourselves. In other words, a “part of the world’s populations wants and insists” that Islam is something different to what our own “part of the world’s populations wants and insists” Islam to be. Further, these Muslims are deeply conscious of the importance that their claim to constitute Islam be a *coherent* one: all of the foregoing claims are made in highly sophisticated and meaning-conscious discourse. We owe it, not only to the Muslims whose exertions and lives comprise the human and historical phenomenon at stake, but also to our own efforts of meaning-making for our own selves, to take seriously this claim of coherence—even if this means that we must call into question the coherence of our own assumptions and categories of meaning-making. Rather than readily exclude from the category “*Islamic*” such claims to Islam that do not cohere with our conceptual reckoning of “how the world *must* be” (and rather than take false comfort in the fact that our reckoning might overlap with how/what *some* Muslims believe Islam must be) we should be prepared to entertain the possibility that our incapacity to conceptualize Islam in a manner with which these “thorny” claims to Islam *cohere* is a testament only to the conceptual insufficiency of our own language and thought.²⁵⁸ “We therefore need,” as J.G.A. Pocock said in another context, “to understand both the linguistics of this situation and the linguistics of getting out of it.”²⁵⁹ My goal in this book is to provide *a new language for the conceptualization of Islam* that serves as a means to a more accurate and meaningful understanding of Islam in the human experience—and, thus, of the human experience at large.

²⁵⁸ While I am not discounting outright the possibility that there may be convinced and sincere statements of *being Muslim* that are incoherent even on their own terms, or that are simply unconcerned with being coherent, I suspect they are few and far between.

²⁵⁹ J.G.A. Pocock, “Verbalizing a Political Act: Towards a Politics of Speech,” in J.G.A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 33–50, at 42.



Let me conclude this opening foray by reiterating that the question “What is Islam?” has regularly been presented in terms of the relationship between “universal” and “local,” or in terms of “unity” and “diversity.” In *any* given phenomenon, the most glaring expression of “diversity” or “difference” is outright contradiction. The main difficulty in conceptualizing Islam/Islamic lies in the *prolific scale* of contradiction between the ideas, values and practices that claim normative affiliation with “Islam”—which poses the demanding problem of how to locate *the coherence of an internally-contradictory phenomenon*. Thus, the opening lines of the first chapter of *The New Cambridge History of Islam* read: “Islam, like any major religion, is a complex phenomenon. Diverse, at times even contradictory, it resists summary and categorical description.”²⁶⁰ We are confronted with a range of apparently *contradictory* and mutually *non-commensurate* statements and actions—whether that *apparent* contradiction is between doctrine and doctrine, doctrine and practice, or practice and practice—all of which claim, to their own satisfaction, to be representative of and integral to a putative object, “Islam.” In seeking to conceptualize that object in a manner that enables us to constitute and understand the human and historical phenomenon at play, we must locate (to the fullest degree possible) what it is that allows contradictory statements and actions to cohere to their putative object (what Louis Gardet once called “a complex unity” that requires “a clearer recognition of a unity of contrasts”²⁶¹)—which we might call the *logic of internal contradiction*; whether this lies in idea, practice, substance or process. My goal is precisely to formulate a conceptualization of Islam as theoretical object that, by identifying the coherent dynamic of internal contradiction, enables us to comprehend the integrity and identity of the historical and human phenomenon at play. I will propose just such a re-conceptualization of Islam in Part 3 of this book, entitled “Re-conceptualizations.”

²⁶⁰ Berkey, “Islam,” 19.

²⁶¹ Gardet, “Religion and Culture,” 603.

PART TWO

Conceptualizations

Islam as Law, islams-not-Islam, Islamic and Islamicate, Religion and Culture, Culture and Civilization

Islam is thus not the simple structure so often portrayed.
Those who find the present fact of Islam adequately explained by the Koran and the life of Muhammad are simply beyond help.

—Carl Heinrich Becker¹

BEFORE PUTTING FORWARD my own reconceptualization of Islam in Part 3 of this book, I will first, here in Part 2, essay a critique of the existing analytical conceptualizations of Islam.² In my view, these existing conceptualizations of Islam, in one way or another, all fall short of identifying the coherent dynamic of internal contradiction which lies at the crux of any successful conceptualization of Islam as a human and historical phenomenon. These conceptualizations either privilege a particular register or trajectory of statements as constitutive of Islam (by implication marginalizing or disqualifying the claim to *representativeness* and *integrality* of other statements), or they identify no coherence in the phenomenon and thus deny the validity of the concept, or they resort to defining Islam in terms of some flawed analytical category with the result that the conceptualization of

¹ “Der Islam ist also kein so einfaches Gebilde, wie man ihn häufig hinstellt . . . Wem endlich zur Erklärung der gegenwärtigen Tatsache des Islam der Korân und das Leben Muhammeds genügen, dem ist überhaupt nicht zu helfen,” C. H. Becker, *Islamstudien*, Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1926, 22–23.

² In what follows, I have confined myself here almost entirely to scholarship that has appeared in English, the major language of the international academy. There are two reasons for this. The first is *quantity*: quite simply there is, as the reader will see, a vast amount of important literature in English—so much so that it has proved difficult for me to manage it in an economical way. Second, since I am deconstructing scholarly habits of conceptualization and analysis, treating discourse in a single language is a less unruly exercise than is tracing the translation of these conceptual and analytical habits across languages. On the basis of my own reading, I suspect that my findings and criticisms will not be inapplicable to conceptualizations of Islam produced in the other major academic languages.

Islam becomes subjected to the problems of that category. As such, the existing uses of “Islam/Islamic,” rather than denoting, describing, evoking or otherwise conveying the *fullness* of the *reality* of the historical phenomenon of Islam have the unfortunate effect of obscuring, fracturing, impoverishing, mis-calibrating, distorting, reducing and otherwise rendering incoherent the phenomenon they intend to denote. The existing conceptualizations of Islam are unable to *comprehend* the phenomenon.³

Scholarly attempts to theorize and conceptualize Islam have been made for the most part by anthropologists, to some extent by practitioners of the field of the study of religion, and much less so by historians or by scholars who might identify themselves as specializing in that particular philological undertaking known as “Islamic studies.” While anthropologists have been admirably unafraid to ask “what our analytical object should be . . . What, for anthropological purposes, is Islam? A text? An institution? A set of rituals? A devotional style?”⁴ it must nonetheless be averred that the anthropologists’ conceptual undertaking has, by and large, been somewhat constrained by the temporally limited scope of the anthropologists’ human data (which is gathered, after all from *contemporary* fieldwork), as well as by relatively limited philological training which results in a relative lack of exposure to the breadth and depth of the textual and historical traditions of Muslims.⁵ If the anthropologists’ approach has been hampered by presentism, the approach of the field of “Islamic studies” has been equally hampered by what one might call an over-textualism and outright disinclination to theorization. As R. Kevin Jaques has pointed out, “Discussions of method and theory have been rare in

³ Jamal J. Elias has recently pointed out the tendency of introductory works on Islam “to provide some sort of grand narrative, which inevitably distills complexity into an ordered simplicity and does away with the contradictions that are inherent in abstract umbrella terms like ‘Islam,’ ‘Islamic,’ or ‘Muslim.’” Jamal J. Elias, “Introduction,” in Jamal J. Elias (editor), *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2010, 1–6, at 1. I do not think this tendency is confined only to introductory works.

⁴ Gregory Starrett, “The Anthropology of Islam,” in Stephen D. Glazer (editor), *Anthropology of Religion: A Handbook*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997, 279–303, at 286.

⁵ An honest recognition of the limitations of the anthropologists’ scope is found in the following positive statement by Leif Manger of what the anthropologists have to offer the study of Islam: “Anthropologists seem to be uncomfortable. We know too little about Islamic theology to know which statement in the Holy Scripture is producing a certain effect. We also know too little about the Islamic past to tell which historical period a current event is reflecting. But at this very point we also find the starting point for our counter-offensive. Contemporary societies do not merely reflect holy scriptures or earlier history. Such elements are certainly contributing factors, but so are contemporary politics and economics and a host of other factors. Our task is to show how all these things come together to create people’s reality. On this I feel anthropologists have something to say,” Leif O. Manger, “On the Study of Islam in Local Contexts,” *Forum for Development Studies* 1 (1992) 51–65, at 51.

Islamic studies. In a field dominated by philologists and historians, there has been a tendency towards *doing* and away from discussing *how* we do what we do.⁶ On the other hand, the very self-conscious engagement with theory and method by scholars in the field of Study of Religion has produced, in the last two decades, a major theoretical crisis in which the meaningfulness and validity of the received category of “religion”—the category in terms of which scholars in this field conceptualize Islam—has itself been put into severe question.⁷

Over the course of the next three chapters, I will demonstrate that the existing conceptualizations of Islam, in different ways, all revolve around two main axes of deficiency. The first is the tendency towards an over-determined and over-delimited constitution of the term “Islam” whereby Islam is conceptualized in terms of a contraction or essentialization or concentration of phenomena into a substantive core, kernel or essence of Islam—which is taken as “Islam-proper.” This tendency identifies as, or gives primacy to, only some selected part of the human and historical phenomenon (usually, Islamic *law*) as being, somehow, more properly or authentically “Islamic” and, thus, *as Islam*, thereby marginalizing, disenfranchising, or altogether excluding other parts of the historical phenomenon. Here, the equating of Islam(-proper) with some sort of restricted and *restricting* element expresses itself in a privileging of the notion of *orthodoxy*—that is, the authoritatively correct—as necessarily constitutive of the more “authentically” Islamic. Effectively, this is an act of selective definition: we might say that, here, the observer singles out one pattern in the historical kaleidoscope of human and historical Islam—probably, the loudest, most apparent, or most personally sympathetic, or even unsympathetic, one—and identifies it as the template or spokesperson for the whole.

The reverse of this same conceptual coin—or, rather, the counter-revolution about this same conceptual axis—is the opposite tendency: namely, to conceptualize Islam in terms of an *expansion* of phenomena without concern to pin down a focal point or to identify a representative spokesperson, with the result that the object at stake spins off irretrievably into a diffuse plurality (rather than concentrating into a substantive essence) and defies conceptualization as a single thing. This results in the insistence that we should speak not of “Islam,” rather of “islams.” This under-determined and under-delimited

⁶ R. Kevin Jaques, “Belief,” in Jamal J. Elias (editor), *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Oxford: OneWorld, 2010, 53–71, at 53, and 383 note 2.

⁷ The main forum for the unfolding crisis of the study of religion has been precisely the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*. The implications for the conceptualization of Islam of the crisis of the category of “religion” will be treated in Chapter 4.

constitution of the term “Islam” effectively deems the word itself meaningless as a signifier of any specific phenomenon—and hence leads to the abandonment of “Islam” as an analytical category (we might say that the proponents of this view have blinked at the kaleidoscope of human and historical Islam and concluded that it has no template or mechanism or spokesperson, but at best only an assortment of local patterns and voices).

The second axis of deficiency is the tendency to conceptualize Islam in terms of the category of “religion/religious.” Here, Islam is conceptualized in terms of the distinction between “religion/religious” on the one side and “secular” on the other, or between “religion/religious” on the one side and “culture/cultural” on the other, where “culture” means, at best “not religion-proper,” and at worst “secular” (i.e., not religion at all). Against this, I will argue that the human and historical phenomenon of Islam is a field of meaning where truth is constituted, arranged, and lived in terms not of categories constituted by mutual exclusion, but rather by categories of mutual intersorption and inter-locution that run athwart and conceptually frustrate the religious/secular binary or religion/culture division. As such, the use of a vocabulary that seeks, in the first instance, to organize and understand phenomena by categorically distinguishing between religion and secular, or between religion and culture, simply does not help us clearly to *see* the human and historical phenomenon of Islam (and we should not imagine that the solution to this is to argue that, in Islam, everything is “religion”—or that everything is “culture”).

In sum, in the critiques to be carried out in Part 2, I will argue that all modes of conceptualizing Islam that revolve around these conceptual axes are flawed and simply fail to come to terms with the phenomenon at stake. These critiques have two objectives. The first is to show why and how and to what extent the existing conceptualizations of Islam fail to come to terms with the phenomenon at stake—that is, to show why and how and to what extent the existing conceptualizations are wrong, and thus ought to be set aside and replaced by a new conceptualization. However, I am certainly not suggesting that the existing conceptualizations of Islam are entirely wrong or entirely unhelpful: to the contrary, many of these conceptualizations are partially correct in important or even crucial ways—and even many that are wrong are wrong in extremely suggestive and instructive ways. Many of these arguments contain valuable and profound insights the productive value of which is, however, often clouded by or lost in the larger context of the confused conceptual vocabulary of the discourse in which they are embedded. For example, one of the most important corrective notions to have emerged in the scholarly literature is the theoretical proposal that we should seek to concep-

tualize Islam as and in terms of *process*. This is, potentially, a profound and productive strategem—but *how we are to conceptualize Islam as process* is a challenge that does not seem, thus far, successfully to have been met.

The second objective of Part 2 is, thus, precisely to be guided by the very theses under critique even as one criticizes them, to take up what is useful in them, extricate it from the context that enmeshes it, and move forward with it in a more productive direction, thereby laying the groundwork for the re-conceptualizations in Part 3. As such, I have sought, in what follows, to be guided by the principle enunciated by Talal Asad:

Criticism, in my view, is most useful when it aims at reformulating the questions underlying a work, not at demolishing it. In such an engagement it seems to me more fruitful to try to shift critical attention toward what one thinks important for research and inquiry.⁸



The conceptual short-fall of constituting “Islam” by giving primacy only to some selected part of the historical phenomenon as being, somehow, more properly “Islamic,” thereby marginalizing or altogether excluding other parts of the historical phenomenon, is exemplified in (but not limited to) the widespread tendency to identify authentic and normative “Islam” with Islamic law (usually identified with or as *shari‘ah*), and to constitute the “Islamic” in terms of conformity to the law. On this view, Islamic law/*shari‘ah*—which, as Marion Katz neatly states, “is law . . . in the sense that it encompasses the realm of judicially enforceable rules and the conduct of the state, even while extending to realms of ritual practice and private ethics exceeding the purview of modern Western ‘law’”⁹—is the final legitimate and authoritative arbiter of what constitutes Islam/Islamic. The notion of “Islam” that gives normative and constitutive primacy to legal discourse is, I venture, the “default” conceptualization of the majority of scholars today (even if it is often unacknowledged by them), and is certainly the habitual one in the popular consciousness of the majority of contemporary Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In the following passage, it is expounded in no uncertain terms by a leading

⁸ Talal Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic; W. C. Smith’s *The Meaning and End of Religion*,” *History of Religions* 40 (2001) 205–222, at 206.

⁹ Marion Holmes Katz, “Pragmatic Rule and Personal Sanctification in Islamic Legal Theory,” in Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas and Martha Merrill Umphrey, *Law and the Sacred*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 91–108, at 91.

contemporary scholar of Islamic law, Wael Hallaq, in respectful alliance with the doyen of the Orientalist¹⁰ study of Islamic law, Joseph Schacht:

It would in no way be an exaggeration to argue that law was the defining characteristic of Muslim societies and civilizations throughout the centuries, and in every corner of the Islamic world . . . As Joseph Schacht, the distinguished father of Islamic legal studies in the West, put it . . . “Islamic law is the epitome of Islamic thought, the most typical manifestation of the Islamic way of life, the core and kernel of Islam itself.” . . . One may even add that law defined not only the Muslim way of life, but also the entire culture and psyche of Muslims throughout fourteen centuries. Islamic law governed the Muslims’ way of life in literally every detail . . . It determined . . . how they viewed themselves and the world around them. If Islamic civilization, culture, or state ever constituted a regime of any kind, it was one of nomocracy. There has never been a culture in human society so legally oriented as Islam . . . Islamic law was not merely a legal system . . . it was in addition a theological system, an applied religious ritual . . . a cultural pillar of far-reaching dimensions and, in short, a world-view that defined both Muslim identity and even Islam itself.¹¹

This conceptualization of Islam has been espoused across generations and disciplines: in 1935, the German Qur’ān-scholar Gotthelf Bergsträsser wrote:

Islamic law, in its fullest sense, including regulation of the cult, controls the cult, is the epitome of the true Islamic spirit, the most decisive expression of Islamic thought, the very essence of Islam.¹²

¹⁰ Throughout this book, I use the term “Orientalist” in the sense famously diagnosed by Edward W. Said: viz., persons, institutions, and discourses that, by fact of their location in a (real and perceived) dynamic of greater political and discursive power vis-à-vis their Muslim/Oriental subjects, construct Orientals/Muslims in (mis)representations that function to serve interests that are embedded in that imbalance of power: “Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it . . . a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

¹¹ Wael B. Hallaq, “‘Muslim Rage’ and Islamic Law (Justice Matthew O. Tobiener Memorial Lecture),” *Hastings Law Journal* 54 (2002–2003) 1705–1719, at 1706.

¹² “Das islamische Recht, in seinem weiteren, die Regelung des Kultes mit umfassenden Sinn, ist der Inbegriff des echt islamischen Geistes, die entscheidendste Ausprägung islamischen Denkens, der Wesenkern des Islam überhaupt,” G. Bergsträsser, *Grundzüge des islamischen Rechts*, Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1935, 1 (it is worth noting, in the present context, that this work was edited and seen through print by Joseph Schacht).

Bergstrasser's position was cited and restated with full approbation by Hamilton A. R. Gibb (of the London School of Oriental and African Studies, Oxford, and Harvard) in his 1949 paperback classic, *Mohammedanism* (later renamed, in deference to post-colonial Muslim sensitivities, *Islam*).¹³ Not long after, the great and greatly-mistaken Orientalist, Gustave E. von Grunebaum, identified Islam as a "system which aims primarily at regulating all and everything in the life of the individual,"¹⁴ and subsequently, the prominent anthropologist, Ernest Gellner, characterized Islam as

a scripturalist religion . . . which holds that the divine truth is not only a matter of doctrine about the nature of the world, but also, and perhaps primarily, a matter of quite detailed law concerning the conduct of life and society . . . a legal blueprint of social order.¹⁵

More recently, another anthropologist, Brinkley Messick, in a case-study of the "relation between writing and authority in a Muslim society" where the "specific types of text involved are basic manuals of *shari'a* jurisprudence" advises us to conceptualize *shari'a* in a manner that facilitates its analytic operation both as *totalizing* and as *Islam*:

Caution must be attached to the conventional gloss for the *shari'a* as "Islamic law." The *shari'a* . . . is better characterized, to adapt a phrase from Marcel Mauss, as a type of "total" discourse wherein "all institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral and economic." Political should be added to this list, for the *shari'a* also provided the basic idiom of prenationalist political expression. For the social mainstream, the *shari'a* represented the core of Islamic knowledge . . . the center of a societal discourse.¹⁶

His caution notwithstanding, what Messick is effectively saying here (whether he intends such or not) is that the "core of Islam" (for the "social mainstream")

¹³ H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, London: Oxford University Press, 1949, 106.

¹⁴ G. E. von Grunebaum, *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, 66.

¹⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*, New York City: Allen Lane, 1994, 17. Gellner is here restating the diagnostic with which he opened his book, *Muslim Society*. "Islam is the blueprint of a social order. It holds that a set of rules exists, eternal, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of men, which defines the proper ordering of society," Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 1.

¹⁶ Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 1, and 3.

is *shari‘ah*, that core Islam=*shari‘ah* is to be located in the texts of “*shari‘ah jurisprudence*,” that is, of *legal discourse*, and that *shari‘ah*=Islam is a *total discourse* whereby other institutions find Islamic expression. One may extrapolate by this logic that it is only when other discourses find their way to expression in *shari‘ah*, or when *shari‘ah* finds expression in other discourses, that those other discourses have arrived at the core of Islam and become truly Islamic. We may sum things up in the words of Jacques Waardenburg:

“Normative Islam” is that form of Islam through which Muslims have access to the ultimate norms that are valid for life, action and thought . . . In classical Muslim terms, normative Islam is the *Shari‘a*.¹⁷

This totalizing “legal-supremacist” conceptualization of Islam as *law*,¹⁸ whereby the “essence” of Islam is a phenomenon of prescription and proscription, induces, indeed *constraints* us to think of Muslims as subjects who are defined and constituted by and in a cult of regulation, restriction and control. As a matter of social analysis, it fails to come to terms with the human and historical phenomenon adumbrated in Chapter 1: the pervasive historical fact of real societies in which Muslims who were very much in the “social mainstream” set up, valorized positively, celebrated, and lived by *norms* that were in theoretical and practical *contradiction* of the *totalizing* legal discourse that we are told here is “the core and kernel of Islam.” And when it comes to pass that scholars, laymen and believers alike conceive of Islamic law as constitutive of and con-substantive with normative Islam, then, when they/we are confronted with ideas and behaviours that are both so positively valorized and widely practiced as to be *normative*, and that yet deviate from the legal norm, they/we find themselves at an analytical loss.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jacques Waardenburg, *Islam: Historical, Social and Political Perspectives*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002, 97.

¹⁸ I prefer the term “legal-supremacist” to “nomocentric” since what is basically assumed here is not merely that the law is at the *center* of Islam, but that it is supreme in the constitution of Islam.

¹⁹ Richard W. Bulliet has, somewhat exasperatedly, characterized the analytical *habitus* as follows: “Whatever the social issue . . . the search of an answer inevitably follows a set pattern: analysis of the status of the issue in Islamic law, followed by an investigation of the practice of the earliest Muslim community in seventh-century Arabia, followed by a notation of any accommodations to modernity made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, any loose ends are accounted for by granting that actual social behaviour obviously differs in detail according to time and place . . . Islamic law is always privileged . . . and social praxis is always attended to last, as if it were relatively unimportant how Muslims actually live their lives in comparison with how they should live them. From a legalists point of view, of course, social praxis contrary to the law can simply be defined as deviant or un-Islamic and consequently be dismissed as unimportant to any consideration of what Islam *is*. But other religions have laws claiming roots in the

The primacy that is given to the constitutive determinacy of legal discourse over other discourses serves to *distort our perspective* and effectively prevents us even from *recognizing*—let alone understanding—that, historically, Muslims have constructed normative meaning for Islam in terms that allowed them to live by and/or with norms other than and at odds with those put forward by legal discourse. Trapped within the parameters of our *selective* conceptualization—within the parameters of what Abdullah Laroui so acutely identified as “*a principle of elimination*”²⁰—they/we cannot understand, indeed, cannot imagine how Muslims can have thought and lived by norms that are apparently so at odds with the legal while simultaneously understanding those other norms to be somehow compatible with and/or expressive of Islam, and hence *Islamic*. We do not know what to make of these Muslims and the way they think and behave: we do not know what is “*Islamic*” about Islamic philosophy (on the supremacy of legal norms: very little), we do not know how the *supra-sharī’i* truth-claims of Sufism may properly be called “*Islamic*” (surely, they are inherently and obviously not so), nor how to reconcile the behaviour of wine-drinking Muslims with their insistence on being Muslims (surely they cannot have been sincere Muslims, and should, by legal rights in a properly Islamic society, all have been flogged on a regular basis). We are unable to make sense of these phenomena, and thus end up concluding that the practitioners of the phenomena were themselves unable to make sense of them and, hence, were just bad Muslims, or were Muslims who just did not think about, or feel the need for, living in a coherent way that makes existential and cosmological sense—whatever the case, we end up viewing them as Muslims non-representative of Islam. This conceptual and analytical shortfall is exemplified in a tendency that Finbarr Barry Flood has disapprovingly identified in the study of Islamic art: the “canonical emphasis on Islamic art as a predominantly ‘secular’ art produced for and patronized by temporal rulers whose piety was nominal.”²¹ Essentially, the logic here is that Islam is

divine, too, yet none has succeeded so well as Islam in persuading scholarly believers and unbelievers alike that the law must be considered above all else,” Richard W. Bulliet, “The Individual in Islamic Society,” in Irene Bloom, J. Paul Martin, and Wayne J. Proudfoot (editors), *Religious Diversity and Human Rights*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 175–191, at 176. What Bulliet means, of course, is that in no other instance have scholarly believers and unbelievers alike succeeded *in persuading themselves* that the law must be considered above all else.

²⁰ In an eviscerating critique, Abdullah Laroui characterized von Grunebaum’s method of constituting Islam as “the postulation of an invariable element that does not act so much as an element of determination as a principle of unity, or better still a principle of elimination,” Abdullah Laroui, “For a Methodology of Islamic Studies: Islam Seen by G. von Grunebaum,” *Diogenes* 83 (1973) 12–39, at 17.

²¹ Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?” 44. A forceful rejection of this position was issued more than thirty years ago by Sarwat Okasha: “Personally I do not accept this view. I hold

religion, religion is law and piety, law and piety forbid or disapprove of the making of figures, therefore the making of figures is an un-Islamic activity, therefore it must be a secular activity not meaningful in terms of or *as Islam*.

This mode of conceptualization and analysis fails to account for the various self-statements by Muslims cited in Chapter 1 (perhaps exemplified in the assertion of Ibn Sīnā: “It is not so easy and trifling to call me an Unbeliever; No faith is better founded than my faith; I am singular in my age; and if I am an Unbeliever—In that case, there is no single Muslim anywhere!”) which are very much a part of a “social mainstream” that was populated and pervaded by the “Sufi-philosophical amalgam,” and which must be taken as expressive of a historical conceptualization of Islam on the part of Muslims whereby the law was *not* viewed as the supreme Truth, or as the core and kernel of Islam. For these Muslims, the law was merely *a part* of Islam that existed in a complex dialectical relationship with *other parts* of Islam: philosophy, Sufism, ethics, aesthetics, and so on, each of which parts was a thought-project that possessed its own practitioners, methods, vocabularies, and epistemologies, that ordered, expressed and valorized *the act and fact of being Muslim* in a distinct way. Evidently, to these Muslims *normative Islam* was elaborated through complex lived-and-thought-and-spoken negotiation and assimilation—both individual and social—between these different modes of ordering, expressing and valorizing that were available to them. And for these Muslims, this multi-dimensional, multi-vocal construction and practice *made sense and held true as Islam*: for them, it cleaved *faithfully* to the project and phenomenon of a God who Reveals Himself to man, and of men who cleave faithfully to His Revelation. In light of this, it is not only categorically wrong, but is reductionist nonsense to say that “law defined not only the Muslim way of life, but also the culture and psyche of Muslims throughout fourteen centuries,” that “Islamic law governed the Muslims’ way of life in literally every detail” and “determined how they viewed themselves in the world.” The law was plainly *not* “a world-view that defined both Muslim identity and even Islam itself.”

The consequences of the tendency to identify Islam with Islamic law is further reflected in the title of the (otherwise excellent) study on the methodology of classical jurisprudence by David R. Vishanoff, *The Formation of Is-*

that the volume of painting in manuscripts of a religious or partly religious character, even now when we know how much must have perished, is enough to show that the artist and patron did not accept the incompatibility of painting with religion or feel themselves in any way derogating from the latter by practicing or encouraging the former,” Sarwat Okasha, *The Muslim Painter and the Divine*, London: Park Lane Press, 1981, 147.

*lamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law.*²² In this declarative title, the *entire project of Islamic hermeneutics* is identified with legal theory, eliminating the claim of the other hermeneutical projects listed above to be conceptualized as *Islamic hermeneutics*—that is, as projects productive of meaning in terms of Islam. The intellectually conditioning force of this identification of Islamic law as Islam, and thus of Islamic legal hermeneutics as Islamic hermeneutics, is seen in even the most self-consciously revisionist theoreticizations by contemporary scholars. Thus, Armando Salvatore announces at the outset of a significant theoretical intervention that he is “methodologically committed to analyzing Islam as the plural hermeneutics of a complex civilization and the flexible medium of a collective identity centered on *one* Koranic keyword (*islam*).” In taking as his subject *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (where Islam is represented by “the formation, during the 1970s, of what I will call the ‘hermeneutic field of political Islam’”) he arrives at the statement that “the main discursive formations historically charged with the hermeneutics of Islam” are “Orientalism, *Islamic sciences with jurisprudence*—*fiqh*—at its centre, classic sociology of religion and new political sociology” (italics mine). While Salvatore is correct to posit (a particular inflection of) *fiqh* at the centre of the discourses of modern “political Islam” (since that is where the proponents of that modern discourse locate it; on this, see Chapter 6), that putative centrality is simply, as we have seen, historically wrong and out of place when it comes “to analyzing Islam as the plural hermeneutics of a complex civilization and the flexible medium of a collective identity.” Indeed, the insistence on locating *fiqh* as the centre of Islam has the analytical effect of radically diminishing the very qualities of plurality, complexity, and flexibility that Salvatore is seeking to recuperate.²³

To privilege the law and legal discourse as somehow being the arbiter and determiner of the theoretical object “Islam” is to *endorse* just one authority claim among many within the human and historical phenomenon of Islam—and thus to make of the analyst an (unacknowledged) partisan of that claim. While the legalist answer, by focusing on the law, provides a facile and thus

²² David R. Vishanoff, *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law*, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2011.

²³ See Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997, xiii, xv, and xvii. Salvatore is himself aware that he is treating a specifically modern phenomenon: “*shari'a* is a notion that has acquired momentum through later growth . . . and has finally attained a discursively prominent place precisely in the period and in the context with which we deal here,” Armando Salvatore, “The Implosion of *Shari'a* within the Emergence of Public Normativity: The Impact of Personal Responsibility and the Impersonality of Law,” in Baudouin Dupret (editor), *Standing Trial: Law and Person in the Modern Middle East*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004, 116–139, at 117.

satisfying clarity to the “What is Islam?” question, it has the consequence of *putting out of focus* the central place of non-legal discourses in the historical constitution of normative Islam. We simply do not *see* these other discourses as *normative*, and do not see that normative Islam is the dialectical relationship negotiated by Muslims within and between a range of discourses, legal and non-legal—and within and between themselves.²⁴ Rather than ask the question “How—that is, by what means and in what terms—did these societies construct a normative meaning of Islam that is so different to the norm which prevails today?”—or, as Irfan Ahmad has recently put it, “why and when practitioners of a discourse regard something as ‘internal’ or ‘external’ to themselves . . . why and how a certain cultural practice is regarded as internal in one social context and external in another?”²⁵—we effectively issue a *fatwā* (that is, a legal ruling) about “What is Islam?” that deems these other constructions less than properly Islamic. We fail to conceptualize a theoretical object “Islam” that helps us to map meaningfully the human and historical phenomenon “Islam.”

A good example of this tendency is the way Sufism is treated in scholarly discourse as a compartmentalized or specialized occasional activity carried out by Muslims—rather than as an integral and integrated element in the ongoing lives and consciousnesses of Muslims. We have noted in Chapter 1 how, even when recognized as a socially-prolific phenomenon, Sufism is rarely regarded as *normative* and *representative* Muslim self-construction and self-articulation; rather, it is usually regarded as *alternative* and *particular* Muslim self-construction and self-articulation.²⁶ One symptom of this is the fact that when scholars speak of Sufism in relation to “contestation” in societies of Muslims (as they often do) they tend reflexively to assume, construct and convey a historical picture in which it is Sufism that is the contested entity, and in which it is Sufism that is necessarily on the defensive against the authority of the law—which is to say that Sufism is in the dock, and the discourse of the law is invariably the ultimate judge and jury of the contest.

²⁴ As Reza Pirbhai observes in the context of the study of Islam in South Asia, “The dominant paradigm concerning doctrinal Islam and Muslim practice not only assesses Mughal polity by excluding the details of mystical, philosophical and theological doctrines from ‘Islam’ to equate it with legalism, but also assumes that legalism is ultimately ‘anti-mediationist,’ playing no role in the legitimisation of the norms and customs in Muslim praxis,” Pirbhai, *Reconsidering Islam in a South Asian Context*, 7.

²⁵ Irfan Ahmad, “Immanent Critique and Islam: Anthropological Reflections,” *Anthropological Theory* 11 (2011) 107–132, at 110.

²⁶ It may be that the development of Sufism as a compartmentalized or specialized “field” of academic study has, in turn, led to scholars locating it as a compartmentalized or specialized phenomenon in the history of societies of Muslims.

Yet the presentation of Sufi discourses in Chapter 1 shows a historical picture where the practitioners of Sufi epistemology are making *normative* and *authoritative* claims that confidently undermine, and put on the defensive, legal epistemology and discourse—which is to say that it is law that is here the contested entity under interrogation by Sufism.

It is difficult not to view the appeal of the legal-supremacist conceptualization as stemming, in considerable part, from the fact that the authority-claim to which it subscribes is the dominant one in our own modern historical moment. *Law* is a *leitmotif* of the *modern* human condition in a manner and degree unprecedented in any prior period of history. Not only is the fundamental organizational unit of modern human society to which all human subjects *belong*—that is, the nation state—*constituted* as a *legally-determined* entity (as distinct from a divinely- or patrimonially-determined entity)—one might even say that the nation-state is a legal fiction: it is, literally, *made up* by law—but the modern human condition is more thoroughly pervaded by the technology and force of the structures of law than has been any other human condition. As Talal Asad put it:

The modern state describes itself as the law state. Law is central to how it sees its structures and processes. And the modern world is inconceivable without the modern nation state. There is a conception in the modern world about something transcendent that civilizes subjects, that legitimizes the conditions in which they can develop, in which they can be administered. Law is a mode of universalization that civilizes, legitimizes, and administers.²⁷

Given that modern man is, to a historically unprecedented degree, *homo juri-dicus*, it is hardly surprising that the *leitmotif* of Muslim modernism of every stripe is the assertion of the unilateral normative supremacy of something called *shari‘ah* identified with law—whether that *shari‘ah/law* be in some pristine or reformed condition. It is striking that so much of the discourse of modern reformist Muslims—who have, for the most part, received the norms of modernity second-hand and by the force of arms and coercive administration of European colonialism—about (what is) Islam has been about rethinking the Islamic state by rethinking Islamic law, and *not* about rethinking theology, philosophy, ethics, poetics, and Sufism as a hermeneutical means to modern Islamic norms. The relative lack of concern on the part

²⁷ David Scott and Talal Asad, “The Trouble of Thinking: An Interview with Talal Asad,” in David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (editors), *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, 255–303, at 294.

of even the most self-consciously critical modern Muslims to re-think or reform normative Islam in terms of theology, philosophy and ethics—let alone Sufism and poetics—is one of the most peculiar, but also symptomatic, elements of Muslim modernity *as modernity*.

By way of example, we find that Khaled Abou El Fadl and Mohammad Fadel, two deeply thoughtful and learned liberal reformist Muslim academics in North America (and both professors of law) both separately *assume* law as the normative discourse of Islam. In a widely-read work, Abou El Fadl seeks to interrogate contemporary “authoritarian hermeneutics” by reconsidering “the role and purpose of ambiguity in the authoritative texts of Islam,” but the texts that he reviews, and the Islamic hermeneutical principles he employs in evaluating the potentialities of textual *ambiguity*—which we have seen to be the major semantic register of poetic and narrative discourse in Islamic history (and the significance of which for the conceptualization of Islam will be explored further in Part 3)—are drawn entirely from the Islamic *legal* tradition.²⁸ Similarly, while Mohammed Fadel states in his manifesto that “the political commitments enshrined in the historical formulations of Islamic law are subordinate to, and carry relatively less moral weight within the normative Islamic tradition viewed as a whole, than do the commitments set forth in theology and ethics,” it is noteworthy that the sources he cites on ethics are all *legal texts*: for his modern sensibility, ethics *is* law, and is not philosophy, Sufism, or poetic and narrative fiction.²⁹ Fadel is at particular pains to insist that “Sunni theologians were largely indifferent to the political theories articulated by Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna and al-

²⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2001, 5–6; similarly his popular manifesto, Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, New York: Harper One, 2007, does not consider the real or potential normativity of non-legal discourses.

²⁹ Fadel is here arguing that “the framework developed by John Rawls in his seminal work *Political Liberalism* provides a framework that will allow Muslims and liberals to explore in a systematic fashion the possibility of . . . compatibility” and that “the Sunni Islamic tradition provides rich resources out of which a committed Muslim could construct theological commitments that contribute to a Rawlsian overlapping consensus.” He says, “This article is an attempt to provide a doctrinal roadmap of those resources” so as to “equip a liberal non-specialist in Islamic intellectual history (whether or not a Muslim) with sufficient knowledge of central Islamic theological and ethical doctrines to permit meaningful dialogue regarding the political implications of Islam for a comprehensive theory of the good within a liberal constitutional order, while understanding the theological limits of what constitutes reasonable doctrinal change within Islamic comprehensive doctrines.” The main “rich resources” for theology and ethics that Fadel uses, however, are the *legal* texts of al-Ghazzālī and of the Mālikī jurist, Shihāb al-Din al-Qarāfī (1228–1285). Mohammad Fadel, “The True, the Good and the Reasonable: The Theological and Ethical Roots of Public Reason in Islamic Law,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 221 (2008) 5–69, at 5–6, and 15.

Farabi,”³⁰ a straightforwardly *incorrect* statement that is oblivious to the historical centrality of Avicenna to all subsequent theology (noted in Chapter 1) as well as to the centrality of both of these philosophers in the ethical traditions of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex exemplified in the classic works of Tūsī, Davvānī, and Qinalizādeh (as will be seen in Chapter 6), which were the most important works in the political thought of the Mughals, Ottomans, Safavids and the Central Asian dynasties who ruled the Balkans-to-Bengal complex for the four centuries prior to the European irruption (both Fadel and Abou El Fadl draw only on the Arabic textual tradition). It may be objected here that my criticism of Abou El Fadl and Fadel is unfair, since their respective projects are, in the first instance, projects of legal reform—but my point is precisely that their respective omissions of the normative claims of non-legal discourse produce a truncated, law-centered construction put forward as reformed, liberal and modern normative Islam.

Modern Muslims, even especially learned and thoughtful ones, seem not overly to consider the possibility that they might think to establish “the Islamic state” on the basis of their textual traditions of philosophy, political theory, ethics, aesthetics and theory of education—precisely on the basis of the traditions founded by the work of philosophers such as Miskawayh and al-Fārābī, and pursued by a host of thinkers exploring the domain of practical philosophy, such as the canonical Tūsī, Davvānī and Qinalizadeh—none of which are legal discourses produced in the jurists’ project of *fiqh*. It is thus hardly surprising that a non-Muslim scholar thoughtfully sympathetic to the modern project of rethinking the Islamic state discusses the subject solely in terms of “the call for an Islamic state is the call for an establishment of Islamic law”³¹ for, as Devin DeWeese has observed:

Notions of what is authoritative have shaped scholarly trends, and scholarly preconceptions have, in turn, directed attention toward particular aspects of Muslim tradition while ignoring or “backgrounding” others . . . contemporary currents in arguments about religious authority in

³⁰ Fadel, “The True, the Good and the Reasonable,” 37.

³¹ Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 21. That Feldman is aware (perhaps more aware than some of the modern Muslim thinkers with whom he engages) that the Islamic state has not, as a matter of historical fact, been conceptualized exclusively in terms of Islamic law is evident from his observation in another publication that “Muslim ethical literature of the middle ages . . . offers a perspective on the medieval Islamic constitution that differs markedly from the picture that derives from the juristic literature,” Noah Feldman, “The Ethical Literature: Religion and Authority as Brothers,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5 (2012) 95–127, at 95.

the Muslim world are adopted as the norm, not only today, but in the past as well.³²

It is important to note, however, that merely recognizing, as does the historian Chase F. Robinson, that “the totalizing definition of ‘Islam’ as law-based civilization and program says as much about modernism as it does about pre-modern Muslims” and recognizing further that this notion “does not issue directly from texts, but is mediated by (largely) unacknowledged categories and models”³³ does not in and of itself necessarily lead to a sound analytical outcome. Robinson seems to believe that if you conceive of Islam as “an intelligible entity susceptible of objective conceptualization,” which for him is none other than to conceive of Islam as “a religious system,”³⁴ you are *necessarily* going to arrive at a law-based totalizing “Islam”—and since this law-based totalizing Islam is clearly untrue to the analytic and conceptual challenge, Robinson issues a call saying, “Let us abandon ‘Islam’ as a term of historical explanation.”³⁵ In my view (to be elaborated in this book) it is perfectly possible—and also *necessary*—to conceptualize Islam as an *intelligible entity* without necessarily conceptualizing it as a “religious system,” without necessarily formulating a legal-supremacist “Islam,” and thus without abandoning Islam as a term of historical explanation.

It is important to contrast the modern Muslim obsession with the assumptive constitutive centrality of law to the constitution of Islam with the striking findings of a study by Wilfred Cantwell Smith on the concepts of Islam held by Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*) in the first six centuries of Islamic history, which concludes that “the *shari‘a* is a concept with which Islamic thinkers in the formative and classical periods were not concerned . . . it is not an important concept in the sense that writers are found discussing it or analyzing it, or are concerned to get their readers to give attention to it,” and that as late as the fifth century of Islam (twelfth century A.D.) “the concept was established and accepted . . . but it was still not felt necessary as such to the Muslim’s conceptualizing of his faith.”³⁶ Smith is *not* saying here

³² Devin DeWeese, “Authority,” in Jamal J. Elias (editor), *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2010, 26–52, at 31.

³³ Robinson, “Reconstructing Early Islam,” 134.

³⁴ Robinson, “Reconstructing Early Islam,” at 106 (the latter phrase is a quotation from Wilfred Cantwell Smith).

³⁵ Robinson, “Reconstructing Early Islam,” 134.

³⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “The Concept of Shari‘a among Some Mutakallimun,” in George Makdisi (editor), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, Cambridge: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures of Harvard University, 1965, 581–602, at 585, and

that there was no such thing as a significant project of Islamic law before the sixth century; he is saying, rather, that the evidence suggests that before the sixth century, Islamic law was certainly not as central to Muslims' conceptualization of Islam as it came subsequently to be—and as it is today. In assuming the law=Islam equation, we (Muslims and others) fall victim to an unconsidered universalizing present-ism, and are failing to consider that the Muslim past (as well as some parts of the Muslim present) might, in fact, be another country.

This is not the place to trace the question of the historical processes by which legal discourse came increasingly to assert its self-constituted authority to subsume Islamic discourse—what Aziz al-Azmeh has nicely called “the appropriation of reality” by Islamic legal theory whereby “Islamic law appropriated different realities and systematized them as part of its corpus” with the outcome that “the world is cast in a sharī‘ī mode”³⁷—which is a subject I am treating elsewhere.³⁸ Suffice to say, here, that in endorsing the legalist claim as supremely normative, we are accepting “the appropriation of reality” by Islamic legal theory, and are failing to recognize the full and central participation of other normative discourses in the construction of Islamic realities. The assumption of the legal-supremacist conceptualization of Islam/Islamic *by Western analysts and modern Muslims alike* does the worst sort of Procrustean violence both to the phenomenon at stake and to our ability to understand it: it effectively lops off various limbs of the historical body of Islam so as to box it into a theoretical “Islam” of our own mis-manufacture. As Laroui says in another context: “By the very movement which enables us to isolate the matrix of Islam, we restrict its areas of deployment on every level.”³⁹



Let us turn now to the second tendency identified at the outset of this chapter, namely, the tendency towards an under-determined and under-delimited

^{588–589.} Fazlur Rahman said something similar about the first two centuries of Islam: “The term Shari‘a (used in this period especially in the plural) is very rare and then is used concerning certain specific injunctions of the Qur‘ān. This contrasts strikingly with the overwhelming preponderance of the term Sharī‘a in later Islam,” Rahman, *Islam*, 102.

³⁷ Aziz al-Azmeh, “Islamic Legal Theory and the Appropriation of Reality,” in Aziz Al-Azmeh (editor), *Islamic Law: Social and Historical Contexts*, London: Routledge, 1988, 250–265, at 250–251.

³⁸ See my forthcoming book, *The Problem of the Satanic Verses and the Formation of Islamic Orthodoxy*.

³⁹ Laroui, “For a Methodology of Islamic Studies,” 25.

constitution of the term “Islam” that effectively renders the word itself meaningless as a signifier of any specific phenomenon—thereby ultimately abandoning “Islam” as an analytical category. This tendency towards under-determination is exemplified in the notion that the scale of variety in Islam requires that one speak not of “Islam,” but rather of “islams.” Dale F. Eickelman pointed out that “The *islams* approach [was] inspired as a reaction both to the orientalist search for an ahistorical Islamic ‘essence’ and to the somewhat parallel venture of . . . unitarian Muslim fundamentalists who regard their interpretations of Islam as definitive”⁴⁰ (or, as Daniel Varisco noted, “The essential problem in the study of Islam is precisely that: essentialist reduction of a diverse religious tradition across cultures into an ideal essence”).⁴¹

It is in addressing this problem that, for example, in 1984, the eminent French-Algerian scholar and critic of received Islam, Mohamed Arkoun, contrasted the term “Islamic Reason [*Raison islamique*]” to “Islamic reasons [*raisons islamiques*]” with the implication that if one holds that there is “Islam” in the singular, then one is insisting, as does “orthodox theology,” on a singular, exclusive entity. Thus, to allow *conceptually* for multiple forms of Islam, one must speak of “Islams.”⁴² The concept of “Islams” has also had a certain appeal within the ongoing *Progressive Muslims* project among Muslim academics in the West. One contributor to the project noted, “While the word ‘Islam’ is used, properly speaking, it may be more accurate and appropriate to use ‘islams’ to resist the totalizing connotation of Islam as a homogeneous entity”⁴³; while another averred, “I use ‘Islams’ in the plural rather than ‘Islam’ in the singular as there are multiple ways of being Muslim in any given context.”⁴⁴

That the variety of the human and historical phenomena might be more aptly expressed by the plural “Islams/islams” would seem to be a potentially helpful proposition. However, the use of the plural “Islams” still begs the question: is there a single Islam of which these plurals are somehow expressions? If the answer is “yes, there is,” then we are still obliged to answer the question: *What is it (Islam)?* Also, if there is a single Islam, in what relation

⁴⁰ Eickelman, “The Study of Islam in Local Contexts,” 1.

⁴¹ Daniel Martin Varisco, *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 146.

⁴² “. . . le point de vue théologique ‘orthodoxe’ n’admet pas une telle vision; il ne peut y avoir qu’un seul Islam,” Mohamed Arkoun and Yves Lacoste, “L’islam et les islams: Entretien avec Mohamed Arkoun,” *Hérodote* 35 (1984), 19–33, at 19.

⁴³ Tazim Kassam, “On Being a Scholar of Islam: Risks and Responsibilities,” in Omid Safi (editor), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2003, 128–144, at 142, footnote 3.

⁴⁴ Amir Hussein, “Muslims, Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue,” in Omid Safi (editor), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2003, 251–269, at 268 note 14.

do these various islams/Islams stand to Islam and, thus, to each other: are they discrete partial expressions of an integral whole, component ingredients that make up an accretional compound, various microcosms of a macrocosm, different dilutions and adulterations of an essence, isotopes of an element, enactments of a process, or what? These do not seem to be questions that those who use the term Islams have addressed adequately, if at all.

Thus, while the term “Islams” was given an especial prominence by its appearance in 1993 in the title of Aziz al-Azmeh’s book, *Islams and Modernities*, the monograph itself contains little conceptual or terminological discussion beyond al-Azmeh’s opening “contention that there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it,”⁴⁵ which seems to posit a plurality of “Islams” without either negating or confirming the singular “it.” Abdulkader Tayob has observed of al-Azmeh’s usage, “al-Azmeh speaks of *islam* as the identity of a particular type of law . . . In spite of his deconstructivist approach, al-Azmeh can still discern social formations that can be called *Islamic*. He does not question the continued use and meaning of *islam*, even in the plural, and fails to spell out clearly what justifies his use of *islam* as such. While he talks of the unacceptability of the use of *Islam*, he does not convincingly provide a justification for the use of *islam(s)*.⁴⁶

The alternative answer to the above question is, “No, there is no (single) Islam”: there are only local phenomena/islams which are unrelated (except, perhaps, in their shared illusion that they are each Islam), or which are related through a medium that has nothing to do with a putative singular Islam; or that the shared Islamic matter of *islams* is real but is so exiguous as to be constitutively insignificant to the identity of each local phenomenon and, hence, insufficient either to furnish universal identity in the form of an external object or referent; or that these local phenomena merely give the appearance of being related when they are actually not.

The existence of this view was noted already in 1968 by W. Montgomery Watt: “Some occidental observers have gone so far as to say that there is not one Islam but many—a different religion in each country or region.”⁴⁷ The most developed argument for this position, which we may call “islams-not-Islam,” was made in 1977 by the anthropologist Abdul Hamid el-Zein, who asked, “In the midst of this diversity of meaning is there a single, real Islam?”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, London: Verso, 1993, 1.

⁴⁶ Abdulkader I. Tayob, “Defining Islam in the Throes of Modernity,” *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 1.2 (1999) 1–15, at 3–4.

⁴⁷ Watt, *What Is Islam?* 153.

⁴⁸ Abdul Hamid el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology

Islam came to be understood as a unified religious tradition and, in common with other institutional religions, taken as a guide to its own understanding . . . In all approaches, the meaning of religion as a universal form of human experience and of Islam as a particular instance is presupposed, invariable and incontestable. Consequently, all [approaches] claim to uncover a universal essence, the real Islam . . . Ironically the diversity of experience and understanding revealed in these studies challenges the often subtle premise of the unity of religious meaning. It then becomes possible to ask if a single true Islam can exist at all.⁴⁹

El-Zein is saying that by pre-conceiving categories such as “religion,” we are analytically pre-disposed to conceive of Islam as “religion,” and thus to look for the universal essence of “Islam the religion” or “Islam as religion.” This focus on the universal and uniform—on a given essence—restrains us from paying sufficient attention to the analytical implication of the scale of local variety, such that it does not occur to us that the various and diverse might, in fact, *not* be domesticable under or expressive of a universal. By way of example, he goes on to critique the work of Clifford Geertz who, he says, is representative of the philosophical predisposition to insist on seeing retrievable unity in diversity (rather than seeing irretrievable diversity in diversity):

The theoretical notions that permit the eventual integration of this diversity are never systematically stated or elaborated . . . Despite his emphasis on the particularity and historicity of these religious experiences, Geertz continues to refer to them collectively as “Islamic” and to speak of “Islamic consciousness” and “Islamic reform.” The unity which he thus imputes to the religious phenomena emerges as a consequence of his presupposed notions . . . the complex diversity of meaning which emerges from the comparison of Indonesian and Moroccan Islam is always intended to reveal similarities at a higher analytic level which embrace the diverse processes of formation and transformation of cultural expression or styles of a core tradition . . . This unity of Islam established at the level of his philosophical premises allows Geertz to speak legitimately of an “Islamic consciousness” at the level of actual experience as

of Islam,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977) 227–252, at 241. The question has been posed repeatedly: “Considerable diversity in belief and practice has been observed so as to pose the question: Does a single, true Islam exist at all?” Veena Das, “For a Folk-Theology and Theological Anthropology of Islam,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 18 (1984) 293–300.

⁴⁹ el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology,” 227.

well. Each individual experience contains the universal characteristics assigned to the religious form of experience and those particular shared meanings which recall an entire tradition of Islam.⁵⁰

The implication here is that there is no unity/Islam in any locale; every locale is one local *islam* in a multiplicity of “local *islams*.⁵¹ Universal Islam exists only as an analytical figment in the eye and mind of the beholder whence it issues in the constraining process of stabilization that is analysis:

All positions approach Islam as an isolable and bounded domain of meaningful phenomena inherently distinct both from other cultural forms such as social relations or economic systems and from other religions . . . [T]he anthropologist . . . faces the problem of grasping meanings which are fluid and indeterminant. He must stabilize these meanings in order to understand them and communicate them to others. Symbols then become finite and well-bounded containers of thought, and at the moment of analysis the continuous production of meaning is stopped. Meaning becomes static through its objectification in the system.⁵²

In other words, when we analyze, we necessarily categorize, in static and bounded terms, discrete phenomena of meaning that are, in actuality, fluid and indeterminant—that is to say, we force a single meaning onto many different meanings. It is fascinating to note that a similar point to el-Zein’s was made already a decade earlier, in terms whose expressive clarity lost nothing for their being less theoretically complex, from a somewhat unlikely source, W. Montgomery Watt—although el-Zein would certainly not agree with Watt’s solution:

The question whether Islam is one or many is not a question that can receive an objective answer . . . Perhaps we should boldly grasp the nettle and admit that the unity of Islam is a “projection,” but then go on to contend that its projective character does not make it an invalid idea. The word “projection” is commonly taken to mean that some quality is read into the phenomena by the observer although it has no basis in them. It may be that in certain cases we have to begin by reading, say “unity,” into

⁵⁰ el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology,” 228–232. “For El-Zein, Islam is not ‘out there’ as an objective reality; it is a reality only as a part of socio-cultural systems, and so always particular,” McLoughlin, “Islam(s) in Context,” 283.

⁵¹ el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology,” 244.

⁵² el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology,” 241–242.

the phenomena, but that, once we have done so, we are able to perceive that there are elements in the phenomena capable of becoming adequate bearers or supporters of this idea of unity.⁵³

The analytical solution, for el-Zein, is to begin *not* from preconceived analytical categories, but rather from observing the “native’s model of Islam”:

But what if each analysis of Islam were to begin from the assumption that “Islam,” “economy,” “history,” “religion” and so on do not exist as things or entities with meanings inherent in them but rather as articulations of structural relations, and are the outcome of these relations and not simply a set of positive terms from which we start our studies? In this case, we have to start from the “native’s model of Islam” and analyze the relations which produce its meaning. Beginning from this assumption, the system can be entered and explored in depth from any point, for there are no absolute discontinuities anywhere within it—there are no autonomous entities and each point within the system is ultimately accessible from every other point. In this view there can be no fixed and wholly isolable function of meaning attributed to any basic unit of analysis, be it symbol, institution or process . . . each term, each entity within the system, is the result of structural relations between others . . . The logic of such a system, the logic of culture, is immanent within the content and does not exist without it. But while the “content” might differ from one culture to another, the logic embedded in these various contents are the same . . . it is a logic embedded in both nature and culture, and which can be uncovered through the intricate analysis of content . . . “Islam,” without referring it to the facets of a system of which it is part, does not exist.

. . . Put another way, the utility of the concept “Islam” as a predefined religion with its supreme “truth” is extremely limited in anthropological analysis . . . All analyses are built upon the assumption of a single, absolute reality and seek to discover this reality in Islam. Yet . . . in the midst of the diversity of meaning, is there a single, real Islam? The analyst . . . must consider systems in their entirety. In this way the multiplicity of cultural meanings is explored and developed. There are no privileged expressions of truth . . . Islam, as an analytical category, dissolves.⁵⁴

⁵³ Watt, *What Is Islam?* 153–154.

⁵⁴ el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology,” 251–252.

There are a number of concerns that inform el-Zein's diagnostic with which I am deeply sympathetic. He draws attention to the fact that when we objectify Islam for the sake of analysis, that is, when we say *Islam is Object X* (e.g., *shari'ah*), we are—or, I would prefer to say, “We run the risk of”—cutting off from that object/Islam “the continuous production of meaning” which I take to be the continuous and varied production of meaning by Muslims. El-Zein's emphasis on thinking about Islam in *relational* terms in a system—I prefer to say, in a *matrix* or *complex* in which meanings are the outcome of relations—is, again, an important corrective to the selective equation of a single supreme truth with Islam (as we have seen in the “Islam=law” approach). El-Zein is also absolutely right to point out the variety and instability of meanings produced from symbols by Muslims across the terrain that we call Islam—something that we have seen amply illustrated in the various hermeneutical trajectories discussed in the first part of this book. I agree further that, to the extent that we are able, “we have to start from ‘the native’s model of Islam’ and analyze the relations which produce its meaning” (which is what I have set out to do when laying out the six questions in Chapter 1 which are representative and symptomatic precisely of “the native’s model of Islam”) rather than try to fit Islam into preconceived categories which may or may not elucidate its meaning.

The problem, though, is that el-Zein seems basically to be operating in a zero-sum-game, saying that we can *either* take Islam as a predefined *religion* with a single supreme truth, *or* as a relational, ongoing and plural production of varied and local *cultural* effects. Since there is such a profligacy of varied, articulated, local truths in evidence that cannot be made to conform to a single universal truth, for el-Zein the correct choice is obvious: there is no single Islam but only *islams*. Now, while I agree that the search for “a universal essence, the real Islam” is a quest for an analytical chimera, and that “the utility of the concept of Islam as a predefined religion is limited” (both important points to which I will return later in this book), I disagree that this necessarily means that “in the midst of the diversity of meaning . . . Islam as an analytical category dissolves.” Rather, Islam as an analytical category will dissolve only if we cannot conceptualize or *locate* Islam in such a way as to meet the challenge of the diversity of meaning, which is a task that, I insist, does *not* require the resort to “essence,” or to “religion” (and is something that el-Zein makes no attempt to do). The challenge to the conceptualization of Islam posed by the diversity of *islams* (as Abdulkader Tayob implicitly recognized when he discussed the *islams-not-Islam* argument under the subtitle “Is the Category of Islam Coherent?”) is, as I emphasized at the outset of this

book, a challenge of *coherence*.⁵⁵ To say, with el-Zein, that in the face of multiplicity Islam dissolves as an analytical category is precisely to say that Islam is not a coherent category, and that Islam cannot, as such, be adduced in *explanation* of anything. After all, as Nadia Abou Zahra has straightforwardly noted, “The comparative study of Muslim societies is feasible only if Islam—which is what justifies calling the societies ‘Muslim’—is the basis of this comparison.”⁵⁶ Now, while el-Zein’s position “has been routinely rejected by all of the most prominent contributors to the growth of an anthropology of Islam”⁵⁷ (not that, as Daniel Varisco pointed out, many have engaged closely with his argument),⁵⁸ it is nonetheless important because the *logic* of its paradigm informs many more conceptualizations of Islam than only those that directly invoke it. Thus, in calling for “an alternative to orientalism,” the sociologist Bryan S. Turner says we must “abandon all reified notions of ‘Islam’ as an universal essence in order to allow us to study many ‘Islams’ in all their complexity and difference”—but what Turner does not tell us is how those “Islams” are meaningfully to be conceptualized as the plurals of no singular.⁵⁹ Further afield, we find two of the leading historians of Islamic art insisting that “there never was, nor is, a single Islam, and so any attempt to define the essence of a single Islamic art is doomed to failure”⁶⁰—a position which issues in linear conclusion from the premise that there is no means to conceive of Islam as a category other than in terms of *essence* (a point to which we shall return). A reading of el-Zein also informs the call, noted above, by the historian Chase F. Robinson to “abandon Islam as a term of historical explanation.”⁶¹

What I find puzzling about el-Zein’s readiness to insist on the meaninglessness of Islam as an analytical category is that this position represents a failure to proceed on the very terms that he himself lays out, namely, *to start from the native’s model of Islam and analyze the relations which produce its meaning*. For, surely, a fundamental part and parcel of the human and historical phenomenon at stake is that Muslims themselves have always insisted

⁵⁵ Tayob, “Defining Islam in the Throes of Modernity,” 1.

⁵⁶ Nadia Abu Zahra, *The Pure and the Powerful*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997, 75.

⁵⁷ The observation is that of Joel Robbins, “What Is a Christian? Notes toward an Anthropology of Christianity,” *Religion* 33 (2003) 191–199, at 194.

⁵⁸ Varisco’s own engagement with el-Zein is a notable exception; see his *Islam Obscured*, 146–150. See also Ovamir Anjum, “Islam as a Discursive Tradition; Talal Asad and His Interlocutors,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2007) 656–672, at 657–659.

⁵⁹ Bryan S. Turner, “From Orientalism to Global Sociology,” *Sociology* 23 (1989) 629–638, at 636.

⁶⁰ Blair and Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art,” 153.

⁶¹ Robinson cites el-Zein most approvingly when making this call, see “Reconstructing Early Islam,” 105 note 16.

and continue to insist, not merely in theory but also in lived practice and experience, that there *is* such a thing as Islam. In “the native’s model of Islam,” the natives are in agreement that there is such a thing as Islam, even if they disagree about what it is.⁶²

I do not here want to respond to el-Zein, as some have, by pointing to Muslim agreement on “central, normative tenets,”⁶³ such as the Five Pillars that school textbooks teach us are the fundamentals of Islam: the *shahādah* (the Muslim’s witnessing that “There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God”) which is an attestation to the Unicity (*tawhid*) of God and the historical fact of the communication from God of the Qur’ān to Muhammad; *salāt* (the five daily prayers); *sawm* (fasting in Ramadan); *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca); *zakāt* (stipulated alms-giving). Certainly, this is a standard, if not default, mode of conceptualizing Islam. The aforementioned liberal Muslim legalist reformer, Khaled Abou El Fadl, in a work directed at a popular readership, lists these under the rubric “What All Muslims Agree Upon,” noting, “I have focused on the five pillars because . . . taken together they are . . . the distinctive elements that define Islam . . . Denying one of the five pillars takes one out of the Islamic faith . . . As long as one admits that the five pillars are the essence of Islam and pronounces the testament of faith, one is accepted into the fold of Islam.”⁶⁴ But the eminent Muslim scholar of Sufism Ahmet Karamustafa *disagrees*:

The only part of this formula that stands up to close scrutiny is the *shahādah*: it would be fair to say that anyone who does not subscribe to it (of

⁶² Thus the statement of William Roff: “The answer to the question ‘Islamic movement, one or many?’ plainly is (to my mind): both. That they are many is self-evident; that they should be perceived as one in any useful, interpretative sense, however, is much more problematic . . . Historical or social inquiry . . . may well appear to reveal a plurality of Islams, but it seems clear that these Islams manifest in turn a shared repertory of principles of individual and collective action.” William R. Roff, “Islamic Movements: One or Many?” in William R. Roff (editor), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 31–52, at 32. Also, Robert Launay: “Of course, Muslims disagree about what is or is not Islamic, but this very disagreement assumes the existence of a single, true Islam,” *Beyond the Stream*, 4.

⁶³ “The *islams* approach . . . disregards the fact that most Muslims quite consciously hold that their religion possesses central, normative tenets and that these tenets are essential to an understanding of Islamic belief and practice,” Eickelman, “The Study of Islam in Local Contexts,” 1.

⁶⁴ “As is the case with all religions, there is a core set of beliefs and practices that define the religion of Islam. These are the least common denominators that distinguish and define the Islamic faith. At a minimum, this core would include what are known as the *five pillars of Islam*. These five pillars are considered the heart and pulse of Islam, and it is often asserted that believing in and accepting them as the foundational articles of the faith differentiates between a Muslim and a non-Muslim,” Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, 113–125, at 124, 121, and 113.

course, after interpreting it in his or her own fashion) cannot be considered a Muslim. But the same cannot be said for the other four pillars, since the ways in which these four performative acts factor into the definition of Islam have always been hotly contested, theologically, legally and culturally. Let me cut to the chase and announce the main point directly and clearly: the four ritualistic pillars do not form a good and accurate account of being a Muslim, historically, sociologically, or theologically. To put it in reverse, there have been and continue to be millions of people who wholeheartedly adhere to the *shahada* but who do *not* perform these four particular ritualistic acts in the manner prescribed in legalistic manuals. Not only that: a good percentage of such Muslims would *not* agree that these four rituals are necessary to be considered a Muslim. In other words, these “believers” are not just slackers who know perfectly well that they should perform these rituals but fail to do so for a number of reasons. (Incidentally, it is chastening to remember that there may well be more *negligent* Muslims in the world than *observant* Muslims). To stick to only the contemporary Middle East, one can name the Alevis in Turkey (fully one-fourth of the population, perhaps even more), the Ahl-i Haqq in Iran, the Alawis in Syria, the Ismailis in both Syria and Iran, the Yezidis and some radical Shi‘i communities in Iraq, Syria and Turkey. To these Muslims, who observe the precepts of Islam according to their own, alternative pillars, one should add the millions who choose to emphasize beliefs over acts and consequently de-value the performance of some or all of the four ritualistic pillars. These are not negligent believers or simply non-believers, but Muslims who choose to prioritize certain beliefs over certain ritualistic acts in accordance with longstanding theological orientations in Islamic history.⁶⁵

But even Karamustafa’s Islam-quantum of the *shahādah* is not as stabilizing a component as it might appear. To witness that “There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God,” is, after all, not a settled end in itself;

⁶⁵ Ahmet Karamustafa, “Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress,” in Omid Safi (editor), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Oxford: OneWorld, 2003, 98–110, at 108–109. See also the older statement by Watt: “In some sense both Sunnism and Shi‘ism are expressions of the Islamic visions, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to put into words what they have in common. The difficulty is made only the more intractable when Zaydites, Ibādites and Ismā‘ilites are mentioned, and the Ahmadiyya from Qadian arouse a storm of controversy. The heart of the problem is to decide how far deviation in doctrine or practice must go before a group is excluded from Islam; and in this respect the position of the academic scholar differs from that of the administrator . . . Similar difficulties arise when one considers the variations in local practice in various countries,” Watt, *What Is Islam?* 153.

rather, it is the prelude to asking a number of fundamental questions: What is God? What is His Message? What does it *mean* to live according to His wise purpose? (Also, the Shī‘ī *shahādah* contains the further asseveration, “I witness that ‘Alī is the Deputed One [*walī*] of God”—which is a statement that hardly leaves unaffected the meaning of the term “Messenger [*rasūl*]” as applied to Muḥammad in the first part of the *shahādah*). The very action of submission, obedience, and commitment is simultaneously and concomitantly an action of inquiry, interrogation, and exploration. That Muslims disagreed about even the most foundational and definitive ideas expressed by and arising from the component elements of the *shahādah* is reflected in the fact that the famous sixth-/twelfth-century doxographer and heresiographer al-Shahrastānī, when

tackling the reasons for concrete disagreements between the *firq* [sects] . . . suggested that they, in the final analysis, sprang from the different solutions to the four fundamental problems of Islamic religion:

1. Divine attributes and *tawhīd* [Divine Unicity; i.e. “There is no God but God].
2. Divine Justice and Divine Providence, with particular reference to the problem of Divine Predestination and human free will.
3. Divine Promise and Divine Threat and the concomitant questions of the “true” faith and the definition of the “faithful.”
4. The Revelation, Prophetic Mission and right to be the leader (Imām) of the Muslim community.⁶⁶

In other words, the mere act of declaring one’s *islām*—that is, to declare that “There is no God but God; Muḥammad is the Messenger of God”—is to submit

⁶⁶ Knysh, “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Heresy’ in Medieval Islam,” 51. From the Qur’ānic statements about the objects of belief, Muslim theologians have identified five (or six) articles of faith/*īmān*: belief in God, the Prophets, the Day of Resurrection and Judgement, the Angels, and the Revealed Books (sometimes a sixth is added: namely, some balance of Predestination and Freewill). These are added to the famous Five Pillars of praxis: the confession of Faith, the five daily prayers, the Ramaḍān fast, the welfare tax (*zakāt*) and the Hajj pilgrimage. Each one of the basic articles of belief is itself susceptible to interrogation and exploration: what is God and (how) can we know? what is Prophethood? what is the Day of Judgement? what are angels (and the world of Unseen beings to which they belong)? what are the revealed books and how do we read them? (never mind the impossible: what is the relationship between Predestination and Freewill?). Ronald Lukens-Bull makes the sensible statement: “I would like to suggest that an anthropological definition of Islam begin at the same point that a Muslim definition does . . . I would like to start with the Islamic definition of ‘Islam’ as submission to God. All Muslims will agree on this definition. Where they differ is in defining *how* one should go about submitting to God,” Lukens-Bull, “Between Text and Practice,” 17.

oneself to rich possibilities of interpretive disagreement about God, His Messenger, and the meaning and constitution of the object of the act of submission: that is to say, the meaning and constitution of Islam. To identify Islam in terms of a fundamental corpus of creed and practice whereby Islam is, as Abou El Fadl would have it, *defined* by these elements, simply does not help us to answer the question of how radically different and disagreeing claims to Islam are Islam/Islamic.⁶⁷ Simply, the fact of *agreement* on a minimal universal doctrinal *corpus* of Islam does not itself furnish coherence and shared identity to the vast scope of *disagreement* articulated in a much larger corpus of what el-Zein would call *islams*.

I should like instead, as a place from which to begin, to shift the emphasis here to another locus of agreement. Nowhere is the agreement among Muslims over the meaningful existence of a *universal entity* called Islam in clearer

⁶⁷ That there is insufficient recognition among modern Muslims of the fundamental level at which Muslim interpretative disagreement historically operated is seen in the following statement by the well-known Oxford don and public intellectual Tariq Ramadan:

There is no “Islamic theology.” It is meaningless, and in actual fact wrong, to compare the often peripheral discussions that took place among Muslim scholars (particularly from the tenth century) to the radical reflections that gave birth to “Christian theology.” Admittedly some debates were lively, and in the course of history in the Islamic Schools the meaning and significance of the names of God and of His attributes, and the status of Revelation have been discussed, but the boundaries of these controversies, in contrast to the history of Catholic dogma, for example, have remained circumscribed and have never gone as far as to open to question three fundamental principles: *the absolute oneness of the Creator, the Impossibility of there being a representation of Him, and the truth of His word revealed in the Qur'an.*

An authentic “theology” would first and foremost have discussed these three principles. But a careful study of the history of the debates among the Schools shows that the disputes took place mainly in separation from these three principles which, at the heart of the Muslim understanding, are the basis of what is called “*tawhid*.” Islam begins just here: to understand Islam is to grasp the meaning and significance of the multiple dimensions of *tawhid*. (Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 12).

This statement is, of course, flat wrong. We have seen in Chapter 1 that precisely what is at stake in the philosophers’ positing of the supremacy of reason as the source of truth is the truth-value of the text of the Qur’ān, which the philosophers regard as the discourse in which God addresses all humanity, including and especially those deficient in reason. Further, we have seen that precisely the pivotal and seminal question in Akbarian Sufism is the relationship between Divine Transcendence (*al-tanzih*) and Divine Immanence (*al-tashbih*)—and even a casual reading (or audition) of Khwājah Ghulām Farīd’s poem will tell us that Muslims informed both by Akbarian Sufism and the norms of the *madhhab-i ‘ishq* actively engaged with the distinct *possibility* of the representation/manifestation of God, whether as “fairy-lass” or “handsome lad,” or as the scripture of the Sikhs (the Granth), or as the beat of a drum. In other words, the historical “disputes” have been anything “but peripheral,” but have been precisely about the meaning of *tawhīd* and its consequences.

evidence than in the *idea*, which I venture is universally held and experienced among Muslims, that each of them, as an individual *local* Muslim—that is, as an instance of an individual *local islam*—is simultaneously a member of a *universal community* (i.e., human corpus) of *Muslims*. This Muslim community, routinely designated in the everyday parlances of Muslims by reference to the Qur’ānic *ummah muslimah* (literally, “Muslim community”) is constituted in the self-consciousness of each Muslim by the held and experienced fact that all of its members share a *somehow* or a *something* called Islam—whatever that may be or mean to each one of them. In the self-consciousness and self-identity of every Muslim *qua* Muslim is the sense that s/he is a part of *an isolable and bounded domain of meaningful phenomena*—and, one would add, an isolable and bounded domain of persons and spaces—that *is* Islam; no matter how vast, differentiated or contested that domain of meaning might be (and it is difficult to meaningfully characterize this condition other than by the very term that el-Zein dismisses, viz., “Islamic consciousness”). The fact that this community is, as Ahmet Karamustafa emphasizes, *an idea*⁶⁸ (the italics are his)—that is to say, in the immortal phrase of Benedict Anderson, it is an *imagined community*⁶⁹—does not make it any less *real* or salient to conceptualizing and understanding the phenomenon of Islam which is, itself, precisely an *idea* and the consequences of the human and historical engagement with and imagining of that idea. Indeed, I do not think it is possible to over-emphasize the *meaningfulness* of the experience of the idea of the universal community of Islam, or of *Islam as universal community*, in Muslims’ *conceptualization of Islam*.⁷⁰ Simply, Muslims have not only what the editors of a volume on *Cultural Diversity and Islam* have plainly called “a sense of universal human solidarity”⁷¹ across geographical space; Muslims have also what

⁶⁸ “Does a global Muslim community exist? Has it ever existed? . . . Yes, it has always existed as *an idea*, or rather, as *a cluster of visions of community* since the beginning of Islamic history,” Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Community,” in Jamal J. Elias (editor), *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2010, 93–103, at 95.

⁶⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

⁷⁰ “Even more than today, West African Muslims of several centuries ago believed themselves to be part of a vast community, an *intellectual* community stretching across the desert they knew and into lands they could barely imagine, held together by scholars and saints and mystics and jurists and common folk all praying towards the same central shrine and living by the same law, parts of which they memorized in the same language . . . It was spiritual unity as much as anything that tied together peoples of the Muslim realm across the Afro-Eurasian landmass,” Donald Wright, *The World and a Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niumi, The Gambia*, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2010 (3rd edition), 21.

⁷¹ “We have to discover how the vision of Islam—making one out of many without imposing an artificial uniformity—can accommodate the particular, the local, and the unique while maintaining a sense of universal human solidarity,” Abdul-Aziz Said and Meena Sharify-Funk, “Intro-

William A. Graham has termed “a sense of connectedness”⁷² across historical time. Two Muslim strangers—whatever their respective levels of creedal commitment and praxial observance—one from Mali and the other from Indonesia, meeting one another in the streets of Manhattan, experience a dimension of their encounter *in* and *as* their presence in a distinct and *particular space*—which is the space of Islam. That space, which is at once the local space of the face-to-face encounter, and the supra-local space of the imagined community, both past and present, obtains in the sensation of a shared condition which, in turn, furnishes the grounds for *mutual existential intelligibility and sympathy*—that is, for *shared inter-personal meaning*. To be located in that space is, simply, to be located *meaningfully in Islam*. We can point to that space and say: *Islam is there, there is Islam*. A Muslim from Pakistan who is taken out in a boat in the small hours by village fishermen on the coast of Kelantan, or who talks football with students from Guinea-Bissau at an African Cup of Nations match in Cairo Stadium, or is embraced as “brother” by a Kurdish farmer from Van in the deserted hall of the thirteenth-century mosque of the Saljuq Sultan Kaykāvūs in Konya, or who has the honour to partake of a five-course lunch with the learned *shaykhs* of the *madrasahs* of Meknès, or who discusses the writings of C.L.R. James with a schoolteacher in a bookshop in Port-of-Spain, can attest, even in this jaded age of global contact, to the particular delight that Muslims take in meeting Muslims from other parts of the world, and to the dynamic of intimacy and *identification* that obtains in such an encounter whereby the Self is transported to, transposed and seen in another person who (and this is important in light of el-Zein’s argument) would, *in terms other than Islam/the Islamic*, be the Other, but who, in the experience of Islam, becomes one with the Self. This definitive acquired capacity of a Muslim to locate the Self in the Other, to make the Self meaningful in terms of the Other through the medium and locus of Islam, might also help to explain something that many contemporary non-Muslims seem to find particularly counter-intuitive and foreign in the human condition of Islam: namely, the profound degree to which Muslims from different places feel each other’s experience of *injustice* and *suffering*, and are motivated to act on the basis of that identification. In these modes and capacities of self-identification by self-transposition the contemporary Muslim is not different from the prodigious fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Battūṭah (1304–1369) who was able to travel from Morocco to Mindanao recording along the way the manners and cus-

duction: A Summary of Papers,” in Abdul Aziz Said and Meena Sharify-Funk (editors), *Cultural Diversity and Islam*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2003, 1–14, at 14.

⁷² William A. Graham, “Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993) 495–522, at 501, and 521.

toms of Muslims radically *foreign* to him, yet without ever departing from a space where he experienced himself as *belonging* with these foreign Muslims in Islam. No conceptualization of Islam that does not take as a serious subject of analysis this sense of universal *belonging* can meaningfully claim to begin where the Muslim native does.⁷³

One fully understands the anti-essentialist concern of the distinguished historian who cautioned against “the imposition of an artificial unity upon a world spreading from Morocco to Indonesia, thus making what it is that the societies of this area have in common far outweigh that which divides them.”⁷⁴ But the danger with this historian’s well-intentioned stance is that it is a short and decisive step from here to dismissing Muslims as existing in a collective false consciousness of universal Islam. This is effectively what von Grunebaum does when he says:

It is taken for granted that all Muslims, whatever their “national” background, are at one in their essential beliefs and practices. That even those elementary beliefs, when scrutinized, would reveal implications and associations not altogether identical is as little suspected as are the actually rather significant variations in social and legal practice. And even were the awareness of existing differences keener than it is and has been for centuries, a community’s consciousness of belonging with like-minded communities would hardly be affected. As a matter of fact, the identification in large measure creates, as it were, the affinities on which it is presumably based.⁷⁵

For von Grunebaum, Muslims’ sense of *identity* with other Muslims is based on *ignorance* of the fact they are, in reality, *different* from other Muslims: “the identification in large measure creates, as it were, the affinities on which it is presumably based.” Von Grunebaum sorely underestimates the extent of historical and contemporary Muslim awareness of Muslim diversity and differ-

⁷³ Pointing out that “human identity is related to itself and environment through emotions and feelings” and that the statement “‘I’m Muslim’ means ‘I feel to be Muslim,’” Gabrielle Marranci has argued that “it is by focusing on that ‘feel to be’ more than on the symbolic ‘Muslim’ that we can understand how Muslims express, form and develop their identity . . . Notwithstanding the visible antagonisms existing among Muslims, a vivid rhetoric of a single, united, ummah is from an emic viewpoint, acknowledged . . . and it is the feelings that may be shared in the form of an ethos. Hence, I prefer to speak of a community of feelings . . . a map of discourses derived from the different ways of feeling to be Muslim,” Gabrielle Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, Oxford: Berg, 2008, at 145, 11 and 114.

⁷⁴ Roger Owen, “Studying Islamic History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 (1973) 287–298, at 297.

⁷⁵ von Grunebaum, “The Problem: Unity in Diversity,” 18.

ence. It is a crucial distinguishing historical feature of Islam that, as a seminal consequence of the rapid Arab-Muslim conquests whereby, within a century of the death of Muḥammad the *Dār al-Islām* (“Domain of Islam”) extended from the African shores of the Atlantic to the steppes of Central Asia, Islam never enjoyed a honeymoon period in which to sedately articulate its identity in a parochial context—that is to say, Islam did not develop for a century or two as a local cult, or as the cult of scattered minority communities, and only after it was safely homogenized, then “go” global-imperial. Islam has been a global phenomenon from the time it was an infant: it grew up and had to articulate itself in the most ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse and diffuse historical environment imaginable: its development has been globally-oriented and cosmopolitan from the outset.⁷⁶ As Mehmet Aga-Oglu noted some seventy years ago, “The multiplicity of the character of Islamic civilization was already recognized in the second half of the ninth century by the leading thinkers of the eclectic philosophical society, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā”⁷⁷—whose meetings took place every twelve days (the group originated in Basrah),⁷⁸ and whose affiliates, by their own account, came from all levels of society: “kings, emirs, viziers, secretaries, functionaries, gentlemen, rural landlords, urban householders, merchants, scholars, litterateurs, jurists, missionaries, artisans, financiers, and those charged with public security”⁷⁹—who

⁷⁶ Ahmet Karamustafa has said that “Islam civilization went global almost immediately after its formative stage,” Karamustafa, “Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress,” 105. I would make the case even more strongly: Islam went global *immediately at* the nascent period—its *formative* period was on the global stage.

⁷⁷ Mehmet Aga-Oglu, “Remarks on the Character of Islamic Art,” *Art Bulletin* 36 (1954), 175–202, at 175.

⁷⁸ Omar A. Farrukh, “Ikhwān al-Ṣafā,” in M. M. Sharif (editor), *A History of Muslim Philosophy, with Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963–1966, 1:289–310, at 290.

⁷⁹ *awlād al-mulūk wa al-umārā’ wa al-wuzarā’ wa al-kuttāb wa al-‘ummāl wa . . . al-ashrāf wa al-dahāqīn wa al-tunnā’ wa al-tujjār wa . . . al-‘ulamā’ wa al-udabā’ wa al-fuqahā’ wa hamalat al-dīn wa . . . al-sunnā’ wa al-muṭasarrifin wa umanā’ al-nās, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957, 4:188. The conceptualization by the Ikhwan al-Ṣafā of themselves as Muslims is summed up from the text of the *Epistles* by Omar Farrukh: “Islam is considered by them to be the religion *par excellence*: the best and most perfect of all religions. The Qur’ān overruled all earlier revealed books . . . Muḥammad, peace be upon him, is the head of all the prophets and the last of them,” Farrukh, “Ikhwān al-Ṣafā,” 309. On the identity of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā themselves, Nader al-Bizri observes: “The precise *madhhab* of the Ikhwān and the exact lineage of the compilers of their famed *Rasā’il* remain vexing and unsettled matters of scholarship. Some have wondered whether the Ikhwān were exponents of Sunni or Shi’i traditions in Islam. And, arguably, if their opus does contain certain motifs that are attributable to concepts associated with Sunni legacies, there is still no consensus as to which school the Ikhwān would have belonged. There is also no accord on the question of whether the *Rasā’il* displayed Mu’tazili or specifically Sufi affinities. Furthermore, if the Ikhwān are classed as being Shi’i, as most scholars*

characterized “the learned, worthy, intelligent, pious, insightful man” as being “a Persian in origin, an Arab in *dīn* [the Arabic word usually translated as “religion”],⁸⁰ a Hanifi⁸¹ in Islam, an ‘Irāqī in education, a Hebrew in astuteness, a disciple of Christ in conduct, a Damascene in piety, a Greek in the sciences, an Indian in expressiveness, a Sufi in subtleties.”⁸² Lenn Goodman remarked of this passage, “I see a cosmopolitan spirit here that is authentically Islamic”—and certainly the declaration amply fulfills Kai Kresse’s tripartite characterization of cosmopolitanism as “*Weltoffenheit*, openness to the world; *Welterfahrung*, significant experience of the world; and finally, *Weltgewandheit*, the skill of dealing flexibly with the world.”⁸⁴ Had Oscar Wilde been around a millennium earlier, he might well have observed, “The cosmopolitanism of Muslims is their oldest tradition; it has been going on now for three

argue, it is ultimately unclear whether they can be classified as Ithnā‘asharī (Twelver) or Ismailī,” Nader El-Bizri, “Prologue” in Nader El-Bizri (editor), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Ikhwān al-Safā and their Rasā’il*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 1–32, at 5–6. I agree with Ian Richard Netton who has argued that “in view of the essential nature of the imāmate to the Ismā‘īlīs, and the inferior role allocated to the imāmate by the Ikhwān, it should be concluded that the Ikhwān were not Ismā‘īlīs,” Ian Richard Netton, “Brotherhood versus Imamate: Ikhwān al-Safā and the Ismā‘īlīs,” in Ian Richard Netton (editor), *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: Critical Concepts in Islamic Thought. Volume IV. Eclecticism, Illumination and Reform*, London: Routledge, 2007, 5–15, at 13.

⁸⁰ The word *dīn* will be taken up in Chapter 3.

⁸¹ “Hanifi” refers to the pre-Muhammadan state of being Muslim ascribed by the Qur’ān to the Prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham): “Ibrāhīm was not a Jew, nor a Christian, but a Muslim Ḥanif [ma kāna Ibrāhīmu yahūdiyyan wa lā Naṣrāniyyan wa lākīn kāna Ḥanīfan musliman]” Qur’ān 3:67 Āl-‘Imrān.

⁸² *al-khabīr al-fādil al-dhakī al-‘ābid al-mustabṣir al-fārisī al-nisbah al-‘arabī al-dīn al-ḥanīfī al-islām al-‘irāqī al-adab al-‘ibrānī al-makhbar al-masīḥī al-minhāj al-shāmī al-nusk al-yūnānī al-‘ulūm al-hindī al-tābir al-ṣūfī al-ishārāt; Ikhwān al-Safā, *Rasā’il ikhwān al-ṣafā*’ wa ikhwān al-wafā’ (22); *al-risālah al-thāminah min al-qism al-thānī fi al-ṭabi’iyyāt fi aṣnāf al-hayawānāt wa ‘ajā’ib hayākili-hā wa gharā’ib aḥwālī-hā* (edited and translated by Lenn Goodman and Richard McGregor as *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22*), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 278 (compare the translation of Goodman and McGregor, *The Case of the Animals versus Man*, 313–314).*

⁸³ Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 24. A more recent argument for the importance of recognizing “Muslim cosmopolitanism” has been made by Bruce Lawrence: “Islam is radically cosmopolitan in its origins . . . Muslim cosmopolitanism . . . is nothing less than the urban, trans-cultural arc of an Islam inspired engagement with our common humanity,” Bruce Lawrence, “Muslim Cosmopolitanism,” in Ziauddin Sardar and Robin Yassin-Kassab (editors), *The Idea of Islam*, London: C. Hurst and Co., 2012, 18–38, at 19–20.

⁸⁴ Kai Kresse, “Interrogating ‘Cosmopolitanism’ in an Indian Ocean Setting: Thinking Through Mombasa on the Swahili Coast,” in Derryl N. MacClean and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed (editors), *Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 31–50, at 33.

hundred years”⁸⁵—and at present it is fourteen hundred years and counting. Further, there has been prodigious and consistent human migration and resettlement within the world of Islam throughout history—the anthropologist and historian of the Indian Ocean, Engseng Ho, has spoken of the “mobile cosmopolitanism” of Muslims⁸⁶—not only through conquest, but most especially and protractedly through trade, again from the very beginning of Islamic history. Muslims have constantly been encountering other Muslims *different to themselves* (and have, of course, also been encountering non-Muslims)—especially in the great cosmopolitan trading cities of the *Dār al-Islām*—and with the movement and encounter of people (and the movement and encounter of books and letters) has come the movement and encounter of ideas; indeed, the tradition of scholarly “travel in search of knowledge [*al-riħlah fi ṭalab al-‘ilm*]” (which in actual fact often manifested itself as travel in search of employment) is definitive of the scholarly pursuit in the history of Muslims.⁸⁷ A nice expression of this intellectual cosmopolitanism is the largest Arabic dictionary ever composed, the *Tāj al-‘Arūs* (Tiara of the Bride). The *Tāj al-‘Arūs* was produced in the eighteenth century by one Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, who was not an Arab, but rather from Bilgrām in south-central India (among Indian Muslims he is known to this day as Murtażā Bilgrāmī). Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī studied first in Delhi (with the great Shāh Wali-Allāh), and then in Zabīd in Yemen (after which town he was then named), and did his major scholarly work in Cairo, where he compiled his great dictionary (as well what is the only commentary on the entirety of al-Ghazzālī’s epochal *Iḥyā ‘ulūm ad-dīn*, *The Revivification of the Sciences of Dīn*) enjoying the patronage from Istanbul of the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd-ül-Hamīd I, and engaging with a network of students and readers reaching as far as Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁸

Further, as every student of Islamic intellectual history knows, at the center of the historical articulation of Islam have been the socio-intellectual processes of inter-Muslim *debate* and *disputation*: whether (as we have seen earlier) in scholarly quarters where the formal science of dialectics or disputation (*‘ilm al-jadal*, *‘ilm al-ikhtilāf*, *ādāb al-baḥth*, *al-munāẓarah*) was foundational

⁸⁵ “The youth of America is their oldest tradition; it has been going on now for three hundred years,” Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*, London: J. Lane, 1894, 17.

⁸⁶ Engseng Ho, “Names Beyond Nations: The Making of Local Cosmopolitans,” *Études Rurales* 163/164 (2002) 215–231, at 224.

⁸⁷ See the collection by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (editors), *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

⁸⁸ See the fine study on him by Stefan Reichmuth, *The World of Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (1732–91): Life, Networks and Writings*, Oxford: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2009.

in the curricula of *madrasahs* for the better part of a millennium,⁸⁹ or, as we have seen in Chapter 1, in society-at-large through the value-claims made by poetry or other domains of self-statement.⁹⁰ Muslims have, in other words, been dealing with *difference, diversity and disagreement* for fourteen centuries. Muslims have long been well aware that they are *not* all the same; they have long been aware that their identity as components of universal Islam *includes* diverse experiences, agreement, disagreement, problems, dilemmas, and predicaments; that they mostly agree to disagree and to be different.⁹¹ One might say that the community of Islam is a *community of disagreement*—or rather, it is the community of a particular disagreement; it is a community that constitutes and is constituted by its disagreement over the question *What is Islam?*⁹² As a village schoolteacher on Simunul Island in the Sulu Sea

⁸⁹ Instructive is the observation of George Makdisi, “Notice here the confusion of terms *jadal* (dialectic), *khilaf* (divergence of opinion, disagreement, in the law), *nazar* and *munazarah* (disputation), all four terms having to do with the scholastic method,” George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, 111. The history of the place of disputation in the discourses and societies of Muslims remains understudied. Important contributions are Josef Van Ess, “Disputationsspraxis in der islamischen Theologie: Einer vorläufige Skizze,” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 44 (1976) 23–60; and the unpublished study by Benjamin Larry Miller, “Islamic Disputation Theory: A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam from the Tenth to the Fourteenth Centuries,” PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1984.

⁹⁰ There has been especially little recognition of the intellectual and literary culture of Muslims at large as a debate culture; an exception is the treatment of *munâzarah* in the encyclopaedia entry by M. Fatih Köksal, “Münâzara,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988–2013, 31:576–581; see also Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire*.

⁹¹ John Walbridge has written usefully about what he calls “the institutionalization of disagreement” in Islam, although he confines his treatment to scholarly discourses; see John Walbridge, “The Islamic Art of Asking Questions: *Ilm al-ikhtilâf* and the Institutionalization of Disagreement,” *Islamic Studies* 41 (2002) 69–86.

⁹² Ebrahim Moosa has observed in this regard: “Each one of us . . . articulates a version of ‘Islam.’ This proposition has led some scholars to say that there is not one, single, monolithic ‘Islam’ but a multiplicity of ‘Islams.’ While I may not disagree with the underlying idea in this formulation, it also has the tendency to miscommunicate with lay audiences or tends to deny the idea of Islam as an event in history. What ‘Islams’ suggests is that there are many discursive traditions through which Muslims imagine themselves. It is through different ways of conceiving knowledge in all its complexity of time and space that people adhering to this faith identify themselves as ‘Muslim.’ In other words we can say that there are multiple and diverse forms and articulations of ‘Muslimness’ or ‘being Muslim’. In other words what we really have are multiple representations of being Muslim, embodied by concrete individuals and communities. To argue whether there is one Islam or many leads to a somewhat fruitless and hypothetical debate as to whether an ideal formulation of Islam existed in the first place . . . For whatever Islam *is*, the closest we can come to what ‘it’ is or is not, is through its embodiment in concrete forms, practices, beliefs, traditions, values, prejudices, tastes, forms of power that emanate from human beings who claim to be Muslim, or profess belonging to a community that calls itself Muslim. Needless to say, in each representation of themselves as being Muslim, they also simultaneously

(a fourth-class municipality of Tawi-Tawi province of Mindanao in the Philippines with a population of 30,000) told the anthropologist Patricia Horvatich in 1990, “We read pamphlets, we read *kitab* from different religious sects. Because we have to confirm what is true! We call it a comparative study of the Islamic religion . . . Because we have many authors, we have many sects. We have many beliefs.”⁹³

The fact that *there exists a vast human community constituted at the level of the individual by an intimate sense of commonality in the meaningfulness of a something/somehow that is experienced in all its diversity and difference as Islam* is another way of saying that Islam, and not merely *islams*, is, quite simply a theoretical, experiential, affective, affinitive, and semantic reality for Muslims. This sense of shared existential and semantic *location*, of a *shared inflection of existential predicament*, is, in my view, one of the most important facts that must be recognized when asking the question “What is Islam?” To start from the native’s model of Islam and analyze the relations which produce its meaning requires us precisely to take into account the local Muslim’s idea and perception of being a member of the *diverse and differentiated universal ummah* of Islam. It is not merely the preconceived ideas of outsider analysts that conceive of universal Islam: local *islams* conceive (even if *differently*) of universal Islam and of themselves by reference to it—and a point of reference is, after all, the most basic form that an analytical category takes. Universal Islam is a part of the self-conceptualization and self-constitution of local *islams*.⁹⁴ Thus, to void and avoid Islam as an analytical category serves not only to dismiss Muslims as existing in a collective false consciousness of universal Islam, it also and precisely obstructs us from understanding local *islams* since, to put it in el-Zein’s terms, Muslims conceive of *islams as Islam*.

Another variation on the theme of abandoning Islam as an analytical category is the well-meaning stratagem adopted by Donald K. Emmerson when addressing the question, “In these post-9/11 times, how should we—English-

contest the meaning of their Muslimness in relation to others . . . in the process, they either de-legitimize, affirm, or are indifferent to each other. Nevertheless, what they do, they do so in the matrix of the complexity of their Muslimness,” Ebrahim Moosa, “The Debts and Burdens of Critical Islam,” in Omid Safi (editor), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2003, 111–127, at 115.

⁹³ Patricia Horvatich, “Ways of Knowing Islam,” *American Ethnologist* 21 (1994), 811–826, at 818.

⁹⁴ “The tension between local and universal is itself a central part of many Muslims’ lives . . . One treats Muslim traditions as local ‘islams’ only at the risk of overlooking the historic connections across different Muslim societies and many Muslims’ strong sense of an external, normative reference point for their ideas and practices,” John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 7.

speakers, students, scholars, journalists, policy makers and interested citizens—talk about Islam, about Muslims, and about violence in relation to Islam and Muslims?” Emmerson suggests that when we speak of violence—effectively a variety of local Islam—we should designate it by the term “Muslim” and reserve the term “Islam” for the universal phenomenon:

What words should we choose to use when speaking or writing about Islam and Muslims, and of violence in relation to them? . . . Some words are centripetal. Their semantic fields gravitate towards a single core. *Islamic* is such a term. *Islamic* drains attention from a multiplicity of differently living Muslims and concentrates it on the definitional uniformity of the singular noun *Islam* as one monotheistic faith—one God, one book, and by implication one community as well.

The transcendental and absolutistic doctrinal connotations of *Islamic* tend to pull that term inward (and upward) toward an abstract Allah. In contrast, the plural term *Muslims* is centrifugally humanizing—oriented outward (and downward) toward millions of uniquely lived individual lives. Other things being equal, when discourse shifts from *Islamic* to *Muslims*, the infallible word of God gives way to a welter of human imperfections. In usage, compared with *Islamist*, *Muslims* makes it harder for the user to reduce real diversity to ideal conformity—and easier to entertain contextualization as an antidote to stigmatization. Deleting the final *s* from *Muslims* does narrow the scope. But the dual-purpose, adjective-cum-singular-noun *Muslim* remains more ambiguous—more inclusive—than the formal, faith-naming adjective *Islamic*.

Fearful stereotyping will not be thwarted simply by renaming *Islamic* terrorists as *Muslim* terrorists—or by choosing to speak of *Muslim* militants instead of *Islamic* ones. But a preference for the terms *Muslim* and *Muslims* can help. If *Islamic* terrorism invites us to infer violence from religion deterministically, as a matter of preordainment, *Muslim* violence in the sense of acts performed by individual Muslims connotes a searchable range of other possible motivations. If *Islamist* is normatively closed, in effect, *Muslim* is empirically open.

When variety is misperceived as unity, homogenization occurs. Some scholars have tried to avoid homogenizing the already singular noun *Islam* by coining its plural, *Islams*, as a diversified complement to *Muslims*. But most Muslims think of Islam as one religion . . . subdividing Islam into Islams may simply decentralize the fallacy of homogenization, as one grand essence is replaced with smaller ones—Egyptian Islam, Moroccan Islam, French Islam, and so on. At the extreme, Islam could be

atomized into so many contingently different Islams that Islam as a category threatens to disappear, leaving little or nothing distinct to research or discuss.⁹⁵

Emmerson, who says that his purpose is the “search for a language whose semantic weight—denotations and connotations—can balance two potentially contrary objectives: veracity and regard”⁹⁶—is arguing that we abandon the term *Islamic*, at least in the case of talking about violence, and replace it with *Muslim*, on the basis that the term *Islamic* encourages people to think of Islam as a homogenous monolith. Thus, if we use the word *Islamic* to qualify anything with a *negative* connotation—such as violence as it is valorized by some Muslims and not others—we end up tarring all of Islam and all Muslims with the same brush. Emmerson proposes that we use the term “Muslim” instead—that is, that we should speak of “Muslim violence” and not “Islamic violence”—which will direct attention away from the universal Islam towards the subjective interpretation of the individual actor. The problem with this rehabilitative stratagem is its selectiveness. On what *meaningful* basis should we use the term “Muslim” to qualify things regarded as negative, not to qualify things regarded as positive? On what basis do we not abandon the term “*Islamic*” altogether and replace it with “*Muslim*”? If we use the term “Muslim” only for “bad” interpretations of Islam such as positive valorizations of violence, then we create a circumstance where “Islam” connotes “good” and “Muslim” connotes “bad”—which, quite aside from not being a particularly meaningful usage (since the Muslim is the one who *does* Islam) also does not necessarily help to rehabilitate Muslims. Also, by what criteria are we to determine what is “bad Muslim” interpretation and what is “good Islamic” interpretation? What, for example, is there, on this accounting, to prevent the classification of philosophy, Sufism, and art as Muslim—that is, “bad” or “one step removed from ideal Islam,” and of law and theology as (authentically) Islamic? Alternatively, if we use “Muslim” for *all* interpretative activity, both (that which we “regard” as) good and (that which we “regard” as) bad—that is to say that if *all* interpretation is “Muslim” and not “*Islamic*”—then we posit Islam as an un-interpreted Neo-Platonic ideal beyond the sphere of human activity. In this circumstance, for all practical purposes, Islam evaporates from the world into the super-lunar spheres. We are then left in the world in precisely the situation that Emmerson does not want: “atomized into so many

⁹⁵ Donald K. Emmerson, “Inclusive Islamism: The Utility of Diversity,” in Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar (editors), *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, 17–32, at 17, 26–27.

⁹⁶ Emmerson, “Inclusive Islamism,” 18–19.

contingently different Islams,” each named “Muslim” this or “Muslim” that, so “that Islam as a category threatens to disappear, leaving little or nothing distinct to research or discuss”—or, rather, more importantly, leaving Muslims without anything that *is* Islam, but only with so many contingent differences. The problem with Emmerson’s well-meaning stratagem is that it proceeds from a false premise, which is his opening statement: “Some words are centripetal. Their semantic fields gravitate towards a single core. *Islamic* is such a term.” This is simply not so: there is nothing *inherently* centripetal about the word *Islam*. Certainly, the village schoolmaster on Simunul Island did not conceive of Islam as centripetal: “We have many authors, we have many sects, we have many beliefs.”

If some people have got themselves into the deficient cognitive habit of conceiving of Islam as inherently centripetal, then (in the interests of “veracity” rather than of “regard”) instead of trying to find a conceptual solution that panders to their misunderstanding—which solution will necessarily be fallacious—we must attempt the altogether more burdensome task of disabusing them of their false notions and setting them conceptually straight.

I began this discussion by characterizing the foregoing two positions, the one conceptualizing Islam as a restricted and restricting essence or core, and the other as islams-not-Islam, as representing two sides of the same coin, or two opposite revolutions around the same flawed conceptual axis. Indeed, proponents of the one of these views often present their position precisely as the solution to the deficiency of the other. Thus we find Aziz al-Azmeh asserting:

A widely-held and disseminated thesis maintains that so-called “Muslim societies” possess a rigorous genetic unity and internal coherence of such import that the question of pluralism within them—its presence, its absence, its legal, social and political forms and otherwise—is one which may credibly be treated in a general way of broad applicability. The assumption made implicitly or explicitly is that “Muslim societies” form a self-consistent unit which may be summarised by a small number of definitively constituted features transcending time, space and circumstance, features that are at once derived from, and foreclosed by, Muslim scriptures and the early historical experience of Muslims.

Of course, such a thesis may be held to be sustainable if one maintained, first, that Muslim societies have preserved a continuity, homogeneity and immobility so prodigious as to set them apart from other human societies; and second, if one held that religion, as defined by minimal dogma and expressed in traditional Muslim laws, as popularly un-

derstood, was and still is the ruling instance which governs the lives of Muslims everywhere.

. . . This is not the place to present my arguments for rejecting all the foregoing theses, not least those derived from the deepest possible aversion to anachronism on my part, and sustained by the realization that Muslims have clearly, like everyone else, lived in a bewildering variety of settings with attendant social and religious arrangements, none of which can be reduced to unity.⁹⁷

Al-Azmeh's point here is that there so much "bewildering" temporal and geographical diversity that it cannot be "reduced to unity" since the only means by or mode in which to reduce it to unity is to identify a "small number of definitively constituted features transcending time and space, which features must necessarily be derived from and foreclosed by Muslim scriptures and the early historical experience of Muslims, defined by minimal dogma and expressed in laws." Al-Azmeh thus effects a conceptual pincer-movement that leaves us with only two options: either Islam as law and dogma, or islam-not-Islam. But are these, in fact, the only options? I think not: the task is to produce a reconceptualization of Islam by which and to which difference and contradiction cohere.



Moving forward towards this goal, I should like, next, to front a set of mutually implicated and crucial conceptual issues around which, arguably, all of the attempts to answer the question "What is Islam?" have in one way or another revolved. The first of these is the question of whether the only mode by which to conceive of Islam as a universal category is by locating an "essence" (or "core and kernel") that is (real) Islam: we have seen how this question of "essence" or "core and kernel" informs, very differently, the two polar tendencies discussed above. The second is the question of whether the terms "religion," "culture," and "civilization" serve as effective and productive categorical devices by which to conceptualize "Islam." The words "essence," "religion," "culture," and "civilization" lie at the heart of the ways by which and language in which the "What is Islam?" question has been framed, debated and answered. By way of illustration:

⁹⁷ Aziz al-Azmeh, "Pluralism in Muslim Societies," in Abdou Filali-Ansary and Sikeena Kamali Ahmed (editors), *The Challenge of Pluralism: Paradigms from Muslim Contexts*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, 9–15, at 9.

Islam is a religion. It is also, almost inseparably from this, a community, a civilization and a culture. It is true that many of the countries through which the Qur'anic faith spread already possessed ancient and important cultures. Islam absorbed these cultures, and assimilated itself to them in various ways, to a far greater extent than it attempted to supplant them. But in doing this, it provided them with attributes in common, with a common attitude to God, to men and to the world, and thus ensured, through the diversities of language, of history and of race, the complex unity of the *dār al-Islām* . . . The history of the Muslim peoples and countries is thus a unique example of a culture with a religious foundation, uniting the spiritual and the temporal, sometimes existing side by side with "secular" cultures, but most often absorbing them by becoming very closely interlinked with them.⁹⁸

This apparently straightforward passage is mined with conceptual difficulties. What is a "civilization"? And is Islam a *single* civilization or are there Islamic civilizations? What is a "culture"? How does the category of "culture" differ from "civilization"? And is there *an* Islamic culture or several Islamic cultures? If Islam is a community, what constitutes that community as Islam? If the "religion" Islam is *almost inseparable* from the civilization Islam, from the culture Islam, and from the community Islam, *how*—that is, by what criteria—does one actually make the separation (that is, the distinction) between religion, on the one side, and civilization, culture, and community, on the other? What does it mean for a religion to *absorb* cultures (especially "secular" cultures)? How does a "religion" that absorbs cultures and is "almost inseparable" from civilization, culture, and community maintain its categorical integrity as a "religion"? Or if there is no categorical integrity (that is, *separability*), then what does it mean to call Islam a "religion"? These questions have tended to go unanswered, even as these categories have continued to be used in varying apposition and combination: "Islam, then . . . is a complex cultural synthesis, centred in a distinctive religious faith, and necessarily set in the framework of a continuing political life."⁹⁹ Here, Islam is presented in terms of *culture* which is centrally constituted by *religion* (the phrase "centered in" is delectably imprecise), and located in a *political* context—the political, in this image, presented as *surrounding* the religion/culture, but being recognizably separable therefrom.

⁹⁸ Gardet, "Religion and Culture," 569.

⁹⁹ P. M. Holt, "Introduction," in P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (editors), *The Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 1A: The Central Islamic Lands from Pre-Islamic Times to the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, xi–xviii, at xi–xii.

The above two quotations are both taken from the first edition of the *Cambridge History of Islam*, published in 1970—and it is not the case that the problems attendant upon the governing categories used to conceptualize Islam have gone away in the decades since. Thus, writing in the 2000s, Seyyed Hossein Nasr in one place posits “a single Islamic culture” containing “distinct zones” and “spiritual styles . . . separated by local, ethnic, linguistic, geographical and other factors,”¹⁰⁰ but speaks elsewhere of “the multiplicity of Islamic cultures within the unity of Islamic civilization.”¹⁰¹ Ahmet Karamustafa, who forcefully rejects the usefulness of the category of “religion” (“a murky concept with an unclear content”) in conceptualizing Islam, adopts something resembling Nasr’s first position when he insists that we conceive of Islam not as culture or as *a culture*, but as a *civilization* that *produces* cultures: “a sprawling civilizational edifice . . . constantly churning different cultures in its crucible to generate innumerable, alternative social and cultural blueprints for the conduct of human life on earth.”¹⁰²

. . . the globalist, universalist, and humanist dimensions of Islam have never been completely submerged by any limited and limiting particularism. Yes, there are many different Islamic cultures on local, regional, and national levels, but identifying Islam with any one of these cultures

¹⁰⁰ “One can speak of one Islamic culture with many different colours, ‘zones,’ and variations or of several cultures within Islamic civilisation depending on what is meant by the term ‘culture.’ . . . If we consider the spiritual and intellectual elements which determine the life of a traditional society, however, and define culture in such a way as to embrace these basic elements, then without doubt there is a single Islamic culture with distinct ‘zones’ or worlds contained within it, ‘worlds’ which are united by the spirit and sacred form of the tradition and separated by local, ethnic, linguistic, geographical and other factors. A traditional civilisation, such as that of Islam, is dominated by a Divine Norm, by a ‘presiding Idea’ which leaves its profoundest imprint on its earthly receptacles; yet each receptacle is given the freedom to develop its own innate possibilities within the tradition into which it is integrated and hence to give birth to a particular ‘world’ or ‘zone’ within the general matrix of the tradition in question,” Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 2001, 39 (the idea of “spiritual style” is presented at 40).

¹⁰¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Unity and Diversity in Islam and Islamic Civilization,” in Abdul Aziz Said and Meena Sharify-Funk (editors), *Cultural Diversity and Islam*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2003, 32–38, at 35.

¹⁰² “We . . . identify Islam as a sprawling civilizational edifice under continuous construction and renovation in accordance with multiple blueprints (these are the numerous Islamic cultures at local, regional, and national levels encompassing innumerable individual, familial, ethnic, racial and gender identities) all generated from a nucleus of key ideas and practices ultimately linked to the historical legacy of the Prophet Muhammad . . . Islam is a civilizational project in progress; it is an evolving civilizational tradition constantly churning different cultures in its crucible to generate innumerable, alternative social and cultural blueprints for the conduct of human life on earth,” Karamustafa, “Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress,” at 108–109; the comment on religion is at 100.

would be to reduce and to distort it. This is because Islam is primarily a supra-cultural package of values, practices, and resources . . . We simply cannot ignore this global, universalizing nature of Islam.

. . . believers actively attempt to shape and resculpt their cultures in the light of Islamic precepts. Particular cultures will always be both more and less than Islam, and Islam will forever be both in and outside of particular cultures . . . Islam is a transethnic, transcultural, transracial idiom that people use to craft cultural identities for themselves.

It would be more proper to talk about an Islamic civilizational sphere with numerous distinct cultural regions instead of a single uniform civilization with an unchangeable cultural kernel.¹⁰³

Karamustafa's purpose here is basically to find a conceptual mechanism by which to reconcile unity with diversity. His solution is to locate unity at the level of "civilization," and to locate diversity at the level of "culture," thereby effecting a relationship between the two whereby "a civilizational tradition, simultaneously in and above specific cultures is fundamentally interactive with and inclusive of culture."¹⁰⁴ This suggests that culture/ local has some civilization/universal/Islam in it, but that the local/culture cannot be identified as Islam, which, though *in* it (in some measure) is also *above* it (in some measure).

Now, since Karamustafa's schema posits civilization and culture as two *separable*—and only *hence* "interactive"—categories, it would be helpful to know what it is that constitutes each of the categories of "culture" and "civilization," and that differentiates each from the other. To this end, it is unfortunate that Karamustafa does not tell us what he means by "culture" (which is at least as "murky" a concept as "religion")—although he does tell us what he means by "civilization":

A civilization is nothing more than a particular, even unique (though this *singularity* should not be abused), combination of ideas and practices

¹⁰³ Karamustafa, "Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress," 101, 102, 105.

¹⁰⁴ Karamustafa, "Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress," 110. The echo of Seyyed Hossein Nasr is strong in Karamustafa: Nasr proposes the "principle of unity-through-difference" or "unity-through-diversity" noting that "Islam's vocation has always been to integrate this diversity and multiplicity into unity both within each human and in the society, culture and civilization in which he or she lives" noting that on the one hand "Some modernist and so-called fundamentalist movements in the Islamic world have confused unity and uniformity," and on the other "No matter how some try to emphasize only the diversity of the traditional Islamic world, its unity remains a vibrant strength that has thrived through diversity, not uniformity." Nasr, "Unity and Diversity in Islam and Islamic Civilization," 32, 38, 32–33.

that groups of human actors—who are the real agents of human history—affirm as their own and use to define and develop their own sense of presence and agency in the world. On a radical level, human history is not the cumulative narrative of civilizational stories; it is the story of individual and collective human agency as defined around a fascinating series of core ideas and practices that we call civilizations. Islam, we contend, is best understood as a civilization in this sense.¹⁰⁵

This may well be the definition of civilization that works for Karamustafa's purposes, but it is somewhat difficult to discern why this definition of civilization, expressly formulated to distinguish it from culture, could not itself function perfectly well as a definition *for culture*—and, indeed, would not in fact have done so if that were how it had been presented to us. Hypothetically:

culture is nothing more than a particular, even unique (though this *singularity* should not be abused), combination of ideas and practices that groups of human actors—who are the real agents of human history—affirm as their own and use to define and develop their own sense of presence and agency in the world. On a radical level, human history is not the cumulative narrative of *cultural* stories; it is the story of individual and collective human agency as defined around a fascinating series of core ideas and practices that we call *cultures*. Islam, we contend, is best understood as a *culture* in this sense.

I strongly suspect that had Karamustafa classified Islam as *culture*, rather than civilization, and defined culture in the above terms, the reader would have nodded in sage and secure agreement, and moved on. In which case, the only category now being that of *culture*, instead of distinguishing between civilization/universal/Islam and culture/local, Karamustafa could, on exactly the same terms, simply have distinguished between Islam as universal culture, and Islam as local culture—in which latter circumstance we could, as diligent primary school mathematicians, cancel the common elements on either side of the problem, and come back to observing that the question in conceptualizing Islam is that of how to reconcile the relationship between “universal” and “local,” between “unity” and “diversity.” My point is that in distinguishing—or, rather, in *not really* distinguishing—here between civilization and culture, Karamustafa is actually making a purely *nominal* and not a *substantive* differentiation. He is only distinguishing between the universal—

¹⁰⁵ Karamustafa, “Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress,” 103.

which he *labels* “civilization”—and the local—which he *labels* “culture”—he has, effectively, simply substituted the word “civilization” for “universal” and “culture” for “local”—and identified Islam with the universal.¹⁰⁶



Perhaps the most productive means by which to lay out the semantic grip that the terms “religion,” “culture,” “civilization,” “essence,” and “core” have exercised on the various attempts to conceptualize Islam is by addressing what is, arguably, the most famous conceptualization of Islam developed in the context of the study of Islamic history; namely, the formulation, by Marshall G. S. Hodgson, in the prologue to his monumental three-volume *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (published posthumously in 1974) of the distinct terms “Islamic,” “Islamicate,” and “Islamdom.” While Hodgson’s new terminology seems to have enjoyed only erratic success among scholars writing about Islam, I have chosen here to engage with him at some length because, in my assessment, the foundational logic that governs his schema, specifically his differentiation between “religion” and “culture,” have been widely influential and often operative in the analyses of other historians, whether implicitly or acknowledgedly. I do not think it unjust to say that scholars engaged in the study of Islamic history, have, by and large, *not* shown themselves to be excessively concerned with the sorts of conceptual issues that exercised Hodgson’s remarkable mind;¹⁰⁷ indeed, it

¹⁰⁶ The complex theoretical relationship between the categories of ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ is brought out in the work of Johann P. Arnason, who summarizes the concept of ‘civilization’ thus: “The main structural components to be noted are cultural interpretations of the world (understood as latent problematics, compatible with a variety of articulations); institutional constellations, with particular reference to the frameworks for political and economic life; and representative ideologies, linked to canonical texts and embodied in the strategies and self-images of sociopolitical elites,” Arnason, “Civilizational Patterns and Civilizing Processes,” 387. The point here is that civilization and culture are *mutually constitutive*, not that civilization is universal and culture is local. See also Johann P. Arnason, *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003. The analytical difficulty in deciding where a civilization begins or ends (both *conceptually* and *temporally*) is evidenced in John Obert Voll’s argument that “by the sixteenth century” what he calls an “Islamic entity” had been transformed from an “autonomous civilization” to “an intercivilizational entity,” John Obert Voll, “Islam as a Special World-System,” *Journal of World History* 5 (1994) 213–226, at 217; see also John Obert Voll, “Islam as a Community of Discourse and a World-System,” in Akbar S. Ahmed and Tamara Sonn (editors), *The SAGE Handbook of Islamic Studies*, Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010, 3–16, at 7.

¹⁰⁷ Which is not to say that the uniqueness of Hodgson’s accomplishment is not widely recognized: we noted above R. Kevin Jaques’ observation that “Discussions of method and theory have been rare in Islamic studies. In a field dominated by philologists and historians, there has been a tendency towards *doing* and away from discussing *how we do what we do*.” Jaques goes on to add, however: “The exception to this rule is Marshall Hodgson’s masterful *The Venture of*

is difficult to dispel the feeling that many of those who have taken on Hodgson's terms have done so less out of theoretical conviction than from a lack of other options. Similarly, one suspects that those who have avoided the terms have done so less because they have actively interrogated them and found them analytically wanting, than from their apprehension that to embrace a neologism would be to acknowledge *a fortiori* the actual existence (and significance) of a conceptual problem in the first place (I have already noted that cognizance of conceptual problems and attentiveness to theoretical language are hardly the *forte* of the fields of Islamic history and of Islamic studies more generally). On the whole, there has been little theoretical engagement with Hodgson, in spite of the very great debt which all students of Islam owe him.¹⁰⁸

I plead that it has been all too common, in modern scholarship, to use the terms "Islam" and "Islamic" too casually both for what we may call religion, and for the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion. I grant that it is not possible, nor perhaps, even desirable to draw too sharp a line here for (and not only in Islam) to separate out religion from the rest of life is partly to falsify it. Nevertheless, the society and culture called "Islamic" in the second sense are not necessarily "Islamic" in the first. Not only have the groups of people involved in the two cases not always been co-extensive (the culture has not been simply a "Muslim culture," a culture of Muslims)—much of what even Muslims have done as a part of the "Islamic" civilization can only be characterized as "un-Islamic" in the first, the religious sense of the word. One can speak of "Islamic literature," of "Islamic art," of "Islamic philosophy," even of "Islamic despotism," but in such a sequence one is speaking less and less

Islam. The first ninety-nine pages of the first volume remain one of the most authoritative and explicit statements on method in the historical and textual study of Islam. For several generations of scholars of Islam, Hodgson's work has been the staple of doctoral exams and generally required reading," Jaques, "Belief," 383 note 2. No less a figure than Albert Hourani wrote of Hodgson's *Venture of Islam*: "Marshall Hodgson has given us a framework of understanding which may be no less valuable than that of his great ancestor Ibn Khaldun," Albert Hourani, "Marshall Hodgson and the Venture of Islam," in Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 74–89, first published as a book review in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 38 (1978) 53–62, at 62 and 54.

¹⁰⁸ As recently as 2006, Johann P. Arnason (not a historian of Islam) noted in engaging with Hodgson: "There has been no extensive discussion of Hodgson's assumptions and arguments," Johann P. Arnason, "Marshall Hodgson's Civilizational Analysis of Islam: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives," in Johann P. Arnason, Armando Salvatore, and Georg Stauth (editors), *Islam in Process—Historical and Civilizational Perspectives*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006, 23–47, at 23.

of something that expresses Islam as a faith . . . I have come to the conclusion that the problem can be solved only by introducing new terms. The term “Islamdom” will be immediately intelligible by analogy with Christendom. Islamdom, then, is the society in which Muslims and their faith is recognized as prevalent and socially dominant in one sense or another—a society in which, of course non-Muslims have always formed an integral, if subordinate, element . . . Islamdom does not designate in itself a “civilization,” a specific culture, but only the society that carries that culture. There has been, however, a culture, centered on a lettered tradition, that has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the *society*, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom. For this, I have used the adjective “Islamicate.” I thus restrict the term “Islam” to the *religion* of the Muslims, not using that term for the far more general phenomena, the society of Islamdom and its Islamicate cultural traditions . . . The term “Islamic,” correspondingly, must be restricted to “of or pertaining to Islam *in the proper, the religious sense*” . . . When I speak of Islamic literature, I am referring only to more or less “religious” literature, not to secular wine-songs, just as when one speaks of Christian literature one does not refer to all the literature produced in Christendom . . . “Islamicate” would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims.¹⁰⁹

Hodgson thus distinguished between “Islamic,” “pertaining to Islam *in the proper, the religious sense*,” on the one side, and “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims” on the other. He *restricted* the term Islam/Islamic to something that he called *religion* or *faith*, and *distinguished* this “Islam *in the proper, the religious sense*” from “society” and “culture” which he designated, respectively, with his famous neologisms “Islamdom” and “Islamicate” (sometimes including the former in the latter). Hodgson’s distinction between “Islam” and “Islamicate”—that is, the distinction he makes between “Islam as a faith and . . . the culture of which it has

¹⁰⁹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Volume One, The Classical Age of Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, 1:57–59. It is worth noting that Hodgson defined civilization as “the sum of many cultures . . . It is such a compound culture that we call a ‘civilization’: that is a relatively extensive grouping of interrelated cultures, insofar as they have shared in cumulative traditions in the form of high culture on the urban, literate level . . . in studying a civilization our first interest is in those aspects of culture that have been most distinctive of it,” *The Venture of Islam*, 91–92. Civilization, then, for Hodgson is a sort of *über*-culture.

formed the core”¹¹⁰—is essentially a sliding-scale that sets “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims” at a decidedly *devolutionary remove* from *proper* Islam: at some point and in some form as we move outward from the core/Islam as a faith, phenomena cease to be *religion/religious*=Islam/Islamic and become *culture/cultural*=Islamicate.

Hodgson regards it as a particular virtue of the term “Islamicate” that it is “almost self-defining”:

The form “Islamicate” has the advantage of being almost self-defining: if it appears in a context where it is contrasted to “Islamic,” it is clearly not just the same as “Islamic” but does relate somehow to what is Islamic. This is approximately the effect intended.¹¹¹

But if the form “Islamicate” is “almost self-defining,” can the same be said of the content of the term? Is it the case that when we look at an object-phenomenon, is it “almost self-defining” as to whether that object is religious/Islamic or cultural/Islamicate—and if it is not, how do we make the analytical assessment, and how consistent and meaningful is the outcome? In order to function, Hodgson’s schema, like any sliding scale, requires an independent unit of measure: to distinguish Islamic from Islamicate, we have to know what religion=Islam is and how to gauge its presence. Hodgson’s conceptualization of Islam/Islamic, then, turns on his conceptualization of “religion/religious”:

In a person’s life, we can call “religious” in the most restricted sense (in the sense of “spiritual”), his ultimate cosmic orientation and commitments and the ways in which he pays attention to them, privately or with others. Properly, we use the term “religious” for an ultimate orientation (rather than “philosophical” or “ideological”), so far as the orientation is personally committing and is meaningful in terms of a cosmos, without further precision of what this may come to. In an Islamic context, this has meant, in effect, a sense of cosmic transcendence, and we may apply the word, more concretely, to efforts practical or symbolical, to transcend the limits of the natural order of foreseeable life—that is, efforts based on hope from or struggle toward some sort of “supernatural” realm¹¹². . . We have defined the term “religious” as applying in the first instance (i.e. as core of the heterogeneous phenomena by extension called “religion”) to

¹¹⁰ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:71.

¹¹¹ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:95.

¹¹² Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:88

any *life-orientational* experience or behaviour in the degree to which it is focused on the role of a *person in an environment felt as cosmos*; a focus which has normally entailed some experience of the numinous and/or some notion of cosmic transcendence, and efforts to respond thereto.¹¹³

We are speaking here not of religion generally but of personal piety—that is, a person's spiritual devotion: his manner of response to the divine, to what he finds to transcend the order of nature, to a felt cosmic dimension of life giving it ultimate meaningfulness. “Religion” . . . includes all the diverse ramifications of those traditions that are focused on such responses. Religious communities commonly possess not only ultimate responses but organizations, members of which may have very little spiritual piety even when they are very loyal to the organization; or they may possess art forms, or roles in the social structure, or cosmological doctrines. These may reflect the orientation of the personal piety, but they also reflect other social and intellectual traditions. Nor can piety be reduced to ethics, though it may issue in special standards of behaviour toward one's fellows. Piety cannot even be identified with zealous acceptance of myth and ritual, which may occur without real spiritual feeling, and at best may be only partial or occasional expressions of it.

Personal piety is in some ways but a small part of religion. Yet it is the core of it. For it is in personal devotion (whether by way of the usual rituals, or otherwise) that the cosmic dimension is entered upon which makes religion religious.¹¹⁴

Thus, at the core of Islamicate culture is Islam the religion, and at the core of Islam the religion is personal piety, which for Hodgson is “a person's spiritual devotion: his manner of response to the divine, to what he finds to transcend the order of nature, to a felt cosmic dimension of life giving it ultimate meaningfulness.” “Religion generally”—that is, “the diverse ramifications of those traditions that are focused on such responses,” which make up “the heterogeneous phenomena by extension called ‘religion’”—moves “from the inward core of personal Islam to a vast body of social conventions”¹¹⁵ in a sort of Hodgsonian law of emanation. As one moves outwards from the personal core into society, one is entering into and moving in spheres where “the diverse ramifications of those traditions that are focused on such responses . . .

¹¹³ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:362 (reiterating and detailing the statement at 88, note 6).

¹¹⁴ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:360.

¹¹⁵ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:73.

may reflect the orientation of the personal piety—that is, the core of religion—“but they also reflect *other* social and intellectual traditions.” That is to say that in the *social* sphere “religion” is affected by and comes to reflect things that are other than “the core of religion”/“personal piety”—indeed, “religion” is affected by and comes to reflect things that may not be religion at all. Thus art forms, cosmological doctrines, or social structure, to the degree that they are expressions of elements other than “personal piety,” are less than authentically religious. Inherent in the logic of this scheme of movement from the internal domain of religion in its core/pure form to the external social reality where core/pure religion becomes inflected (infected?) by other social and intellectual traditions—which external social reality is precisely the world of Muslims’ self-expression and communication in literature, art, philosophy, political organization, *etcetera*—is that literature, art, philosophy, political organization, *etcetera* become, by degrees, less or other than *properly religious*. That is, literature, art, philosophy, political organization, *etcetera* become less or less properly *Islam* or Islamic: they eventually move from religion to culture and become *Islamicate*. Indeed, Hodgson’s conceptualization of Islam is a sort of fundamentalism of personal piety in that it is personal piety that is *most* Islam/ic, while its social ramifications are less Islamic to the eventual point of becoming Islamicate.¹¹⁶

But if the “religious”/“the core of religion” is a person’s “ultimate cosmic orientation and commitments and the ways in which he pays attention to them, privately or with others . . . so far as the orientation is personally com-

¹¹⁶ Bryan S. Turner has characterized Hodgson’s scheme as one where “the closer one draws to the inner circle of faith, the further one withdraws from sociological forces. The inner religion of faith is independent of society as an irreducible pious fact . . . The consequence of such an approach was to provide, so to speak, a religious niche or hiding place within which ‘faith’ could remain sociologically immune,” Bryan S. Turner, “Conscience in the Construction of Religion,” in Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, London: Routledge, 1994, 53–66, at 54–55. Turner attributes the fundamental place of personal piety in Hodgson’s schema to the fact that he was a practicing Quaker whose “Quaker convictions are central to his theoretical comprehension of Islam” and argued that “it is difficult not to read *The Venture of Islam* without an awareness of the prominence of Quaker theology dominating certain key issues,” Turner, “Conscience in the Construction of Religion,” 60. Perhaps the most salient element of Quakerism for Hodgson’s centering of personal piety is something that Turner does not quite spell out, namely the lynch-pin Quaker notion of the “Inner Light” or “divine Light of Christ” that guides each individual, the experience of which is the most fundamental religious condition (indeed, in a chapter on “Muslim Personal Piety,” Hodgson speaks of piety as “a daily walking in the divine Light,” Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:361). It is worth noting that, despite his critique, Turner himself adopted the “terminology that was developed by Marshall G. S. Hodgson . . . in which he usefully distinguished between Islam, Islamdom and Islamicate,” Bryan S. Turner, “Introduction: Islam and Islamic Studies,” in Bryan S. Turner (editor), *Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, London: Routledge, 2003, 1–41, at 1.

mitting and is meaningful in terms of a cosmos, without further precision of what this may come to . . . any *life-orientational* experience or behaviour in the degree to which it is focused on the role of a *person in an environment felt as cosmos*,” then surely literature, art, and philosophy are *precisely* expressions, elaborations and explorations of “*life-orientational* experience or behaviour . . . focused on the role of a *person in an environment felt as cosmos*”? Even despotism, if conceived as an expression of political order in harmony with the order of the cosmos, can legitimately be understood in these terms.¹¹⁷ Why is it, then, that “One can speak of ‘Islamic literature,’ of ‘Islamic art,’ of ‘Islamic philosophy,’ even of ‘Islamic despotism,’ but in such a sequence one is speaking less and less of something that expresses Islam as a faith” to the point that we should categorize these latter as Islamicate/cultural rather than Islamic “proper”? Is the “role of a person in an environment felt as cosmos” not precisely what we have seen in the respective expressions of each of philosophy, art, literature and politics in the diagnostic questions laid out in Chapter 1?

While Hodgson makes the apparently catholic statement that there are “contrasting styles of personal piety and devotion” and that “no one of these styles of piety can be identified simply with ‘Islam,’ though the adherents of each claimed it presented the only true Islam,”¹¹⁸ his own construction of piety emerges in the foregoing passage as a heavily circumscribed one. A Muslim will not satisfy Hodgson’s narrow construction of piety by claiming that his *piety*, his *ultimate response*, his *felt cosmic dimension of life giving it ultimate meaningfulness*—that is, his *Islam*—obtains or resides at the core in his committed rational inquiry into the order of the cosmos (to seek the meaning of the cosmos by the priority of reason is evidently, for Hodgson, not “properly Islamic”; it is Islamicate), nor, for that matter, in his readiness to lay down his life for his fellow Muslims, which many might consider an something of an “ultimate response” (“members . . . may have very little spiritual piety even when they are very loyal to the organization”), nor in his ethics (“nor can piety be reduced to ethics”), nor in a mode of verbal expression, nor in an aesthetic sensibility (“art forms”), nor in simple zeal, enchantment or wonder (“zealous acceptance of myth or ritual”). These dimensions of being do not have a sufficient ration of what Hodgson calls “real spiritual feeling”; they are rendered by him somehow less than ultimate by the fact that “they also reflect other social and intellectual traditions.” The irony is

¹¹⁷ Turner is simply wrong to say that Hodgson “wants to treat the main articulation of piety as art, poetry and philosophy.” It is not the case at all (see Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, 66).

¹¹⁸ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:360–361.

that for all the vastness of the historical landscape of Hodgson's *Venture of Islam*, his notion of the true Islam is a relatively narrow and decidedly arbitrary one. Hodgson conceives, or rather *pre-conceives*, of piety/religion/Islam-proper in such selective terms as to limit the ways in which Islam can be thought about. In making the Islam/ic vs. Islamicate distinction, Hodgson insists that he is doing nothing different to what Muslims have themselves historically done:

Islam . . . tended to call forth a total social pattern in the name of religion itself . . . In principle, any religious allegiance might make demands on every aspect of life to such a degree that a religious body could constitute a complete society, its way of life a self-sufficient culture. But Islam especially has tended to make this kind of total demand on life. In many spheres, not only public worship but such spheres as civil law, historical teaching, or social etiquette, Muslims succeeded quite early in establishing distinctive patterns identifiable with Islam as a religion. But even Islam could not be total. Even in these preferred spheres, specifically Islamic patterns rarely prevailed exclusively; and in many other spheres such as trade or poetry, the articulated religion had to be content to lay down limits which the merchant or poet should not overstep. Otherwise, these aspects of culture were cultivated in substantial autonomy from any particular religious allegiance. What was religion and, in particular, what was Islam, was always, if diversely, kept consciously distinct from the total culture of Muslim society. In even the most pious man's life, there was much that he could not call religious.¹¹⁹

Here, Hodgson presents us with an important tension. On the one hand "Islam tended to call forth a total social pattern in the name of religion," indeed, "especially has tended to make this kind of total demand on life"; on the other hand "What was Islam was always, if diversely, kept consciously distinct from the total culture of Muslim society" such that "in even the most pious man's life there was much he could not call religious [=Islam]." But was this in fact the case? Just how *distinct* is/was Islam from the total culture of Muslim society? If Islam is kept by Muslims *consciously* distinct from the Islamicate, then, surely, that conscious distinction should be relatively easy for the analyst to identify and make. Even if that distinction is made "diversely"—that is, by different Muslims in different ways and by different means—the diverse ways and means by which the distinction is consciously

¹¹⁹ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:89 (italics mine).

made should present themselves to the observer in a relatively self-evident if not self-stated way. The Islamicate—art, literature, politics, wine-drinking, etcetera—should present itself in a distinct vocabulary and with a distinct register of meanings (or, in Hodgson’s term, as a distinct “pattern”) that is “self-definingly” and self-statedly and distinctly Islamicate and not Islamic. But the examples given in Chapter 1 strongly suggest the exact opposite: the vocabularies and meanings of the discourses and practices of literature, art, politics, wine-drinking, *etcetera*, appear anything *except* distinct and separable from the vocabularies and meanings of the revelation to Muhammad—rather, as we have seen, they are perfused with, implicated in, and constructed of the same working elements, so that it is not at all clear how “culture” is to be filtered out of “religion,” or “religion” distilled out of “culture.” Indeed, it would appear that the Muslim practitioners of art, literature and politics in Chapter 1 are going out of their way *not* so much as to *make* a conscious distinction as to con-fuse or con-found any distinction—or if they are making a distinction, they are being confoundingly confusing about it.

Hodgson’s schema requires of us at each instant to stop and ask of a given phenomenon: “Is this Islam/Islamic or Islamicate?”—which, on Hodgson’s criteria, is the question, “Does this contain a sufficient quantum of ‘piety’ (or a sufficiently high piety-to-culture ratio) for it to be Islamic or does it somehow fail the litmus test and fade out of Islam into Islamicate?” And if Muslims will not help us in making the distinction between Islamic and Islamicate, we risk falling back uncritically on our own received criteria—which is what Hodgson does when he grounds his conceptualization of Islam in his axiomatic assumption of the commensurability of Islam and Christianity as parallel and mutually translatable phenomena. And in making his conceptual distinction between Islam/ic and Islamicate, Hodgson’s tacit conceptual model is (his understanding of) Christianity:

The term “Islamdom” will be immediately intelligible by analogy with Christendom . . . The adjective “Islamic” correspondingly, must be restricted to “of or pertaining to” Islamic *in the proper, the religious, sense . . .* When I speak of Islamic literature, I am referring only to more or less “religious” literature, not to secular wine-songs, just as when one speaks of Christian literature one does not refer to all the literature produced in Christendom . . . “Islamicate” would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but tho the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and Muslims¹²⁰. . . If we speak in this work of “Islamic”

¹²⁰ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:58–59.

art or literature, then, we will be referring to religious art or literature within the traditions of Islamic faith, in the same sense as we refer to “Christian” art or literature.¹²¹

Thus, for Hodgson, literature and art are “Islamic” only when they clearly treat “religious” themes *“in the same sense as we refer to ‘Christian’ art or literature”*—otherwise, they are Islamicate. But does it, in fact, make sense to assume that “Islam” and “Christianity” are mutually intelligible phenomena that are explicable or meaningful in parallel terms of—that is, *in the same sense as/by analogy with*—each other? Let us take, by way of illustration, the case of “literature.” I would argue that the fundamental tenor of the literary expression of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex for the better part of a millennium has been, as in the paradigmatic case of Hāfiẓian literature, precisely and *uniquely*—that is, *without* an equivalent scale and significance in Christianity, and *therefore* without an equivalent “sense”—a *con-founding* or *con-fusion* of “religious” and “non-religious” themes and motifs in poetry about love, wine and pretty boys and girls that is both about love, wine and pretty boys and girls, as well as about the relationship of the Muslim to God. I am not suggesting that this sort of con-founding or con-fusion of “religious” and “non-religious” is entirely absent in Christianity or any other tradition: the point I am making is that of the *scale* and *normativity* of a given phenomenon or element within a given tradition. A literary tradition in which such a con-fusion is commonplace and normative is not conceptually and analytically commensurable with a tradition in which it is not: there is a scalar point at which quantitative difference is qualitative difference.¹²² When Hodgson distinguishes Islamic from Islamicate by constituting Islamic “in the same sense as Christian,” he is ignoring this crucial difference in the constitution and configuration of the two phenomena, and is forcing the one into the mould of the other. Hafizian discourse shows us that Muslims express themselves in literature in a *different* sense to Christians—there is no scalar or paradigmatic equivalent to Hāfiẓian discourse in the literary history of societies of Christians; it is *uniquely* the literary idiom of societies of Muslims. To presume that a *distinction* between “secular” and “religious” literature that might be self-defining or self-evident to us in the Christian context is necessarily and equivalently meaningful in conceptualizing and categorizing the literary discourses of Muslims serves precisely to put out of conceptual focus the crucial and distinctive con-founding or con-fusing qual-

¹²¹ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:94.

¹²² This point will be taken up in Chapter 5.

ity of the paradigmatic literary expression of Muslims that is the very opposite of a clear-cut “secular” versus “religious” or “religious” versus “cultural” distinction. Indeed—and this is important—instead of making us realize that it is crucial to (try to) conceptualize the literature of Muslims on its own terms of engagement, Hodgson’s distinction between “Islam=religion” and “Islamicate=culture=secular” diverts and restrains us from the possibility of conceiving of Hafizian literature as symptomatic and constitutive of Islam, rather than as “secular” or Islamicate “wine song,”¹²³ or from conceptualizing art as symptomatic and constitutive of Islam rather than of “the social and cultural complex associated with Islam and the Muslims.”¹²⁴

The arbitrariness of Hodgson’s criteria and schema¹²⁵ leads him also to fall into the legal-supremacist trap—which is as one might expect from a pious fundamentalist conceptualization of Islam. In an abstruse essay entitled “Cultural Patterning in Islamdom and Occident,” where he identifies the fundamental difference between the two as obtaining in the legally-iterated contrast between “Occidental corporatism” and “Islamicate contractualism,” Hodgson constitutes the Islamicate “cultural patterning” squarely in terms of the values of Islamic law:

To Islamicate “contractualism” in the social sphere the most appropriate analogy in the visual arts is doubtless the arabesque-type patterning . . . To put the overall style in a formula . . . *the sense of good order demanded a pattern of equal and transferable units satisfying a single set of fixed standards in a field penetrable to several levels and universally extendable . . .*¹²⁶

Here Hodgson has identified the very warp and woof of Islamicate culture as obtaining in the defining egalitarian spirit of Islamic law. Now, we have noted at the outset how Islamic philosophy, Sufism and their amalgams in “philosophic religion” are all based on a *hierarchical* concept of Truth and the cosmos. To the extent that Muslims affiliated themselves with these ideas and

¹²³ It is, perhaps, instructive that in his treatment of Hafiz, Hodgson makes no statement as to whether we should conceive of his poetry as Islamic or Islamicate—rather, he presents him as an example of “rhetoricism and subtlety in the Persianate literary tradition,” Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2:497–490.

¹²⁴ Hodgson treats art as definitively Islamicate; see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2:503–524.

¹²⁵ Hodgson also reports Bernard Lewis as suggesting, perhaps even more arbitrarily, “that the adjective ‘Islamic’ be used in the . . . cultural sense, and the adjective ‘Muslim’ in the . . . religious sense,” Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:58.

¹²⁶ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2:344–345.

values, we must, therefore, regard *hierarchy* as central to and definitive of human and historical Islam. The phenomena we raised in the first part of this book speak to a very different “cultural patterning” to that formulated by Hodgson: if we were to amend Hodgson’s statement, we might say that these phenomena are collectively expressive of *the sense of good order that demands a pattern of unequal and non-transferable units satisfying a gradation of standards each of which penetrates a single level of a differentiated field which (level) is non-extendable through the universe which (universe) rather comprises a hierarchy*. In short: there is at least as much cause to conceptualize human and historical Islam as a phenomenon of *hierarchy/philosophy/Sufism* as there is to conceptualize it as phenomenon of *egalitarianism/law*.¹²⁷

Edmund Burke III (an admirer of Hodgson) pointed out in a rigorous review of *The Venture of Islam* that “by the time that we reach the chapter ‘Cultural Patterning in Islamdom and the Occident,’ . . . Hodgson presents the shari‘a as nothing less than the organizing principle of Islamic society.”¹²⁸ That Hodgson’s Islamic/Islamicate distinction lends itself to a “legal-supremacist” position may be seen in the development and application of its logic by another scholar, A. Kevin Reinhart, who is here writing about Islamic ethics:

Marshall Hodgson has introduced a helpful distinction between Islamic as “pertaining to Islam in the proper, the religious sense” and Islamicate as “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and Muslims.” If we accept this distinction, then it is arguable that Islamic ethics can refer only to Islamic law and legal theory. Excluded from Islamic ethics would be the cultural practices which distinguish Algerians from Pakistanis, including their behavioural norms, as well as philosophical ethics. These would fall into the domain of Islamicate ethics . . . Yet because ethics is basically a practical science that studies normative action, the purely theoretical efforts of Islamic theologians (such as

¹²⁷ Of course, to conceptualize Islam as law is not necessarily to ignore hierarchy. Thus Brinkley Messick recognizes that “shari‘a discourse” distinguishes a hierarchy of those who have knowledge and those who do not—but he presents that hierarchy as constituted only in the terms put forward by the practitioners of legal discourse, without recognition of the presence in society of the hierarchical discourses of Sufism and philosophy, which present the law itself as a knowledge that comes lower down the hierarchy; see Brinkley Messick, “Kissing Hands and Knees: Hegemony and Hierarchy in Shari‘a Discourse,” *Law and Society Review* 22 (1988) 637–659. It may seem unfair to fault Messick for citing only legal sources in an article on “Hierarchy in Shari‘a Discourse,” but the omission of other discourses results in a profoundly incomplete picture of the notions of hierarchy operating in a society of Muslims *as Islam*.

¹²⁸ Edmund Burke III, “Islamic History as World History: Marshall Hodgson, ‘The Venture of Islam,’” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10 (1979) 241–264, at 262.

Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arites) to describe, for example, whether God creates and is responsible for human actions, is arguably not part of Islamic ethics either. The Islamic summons has largely been understood by Muslims to be a call to righteous action in conformity with the guidance of Revelation. There is no doubt that if most Muslims were asked which science is decisive for the determination of right action, they would nominate the Islamic legal sciences, namely the *fiqh* sciences. Among the Islamicate intellectual disciplines, only Islamic law is both practical and theoretical, concerned with human action in the world, and (strictly speaking) religious. In this sense, Islamic law and legal theory must be the true locus of the discussion of Islamic ethics . . . Islamic law is the central domain of Islamic ethical thought.¹²⁹

Here we have gone in straightforward logical progression from the Hodgsonian distinction between Islam and Islamicate to the view that in Islam, ethics—that is, that which establishes right and wrong behaviour—is the law: “Excluded from Islamic ethics would be cultural practices . . . behavioural norms, as well as philosophical ethics . . . Islamic law and legal theory must be the true locus of the discussion of Islamic ethics.” Hodgson’s schema has proved itself entirely susceptible to translation into the erroneous totalizing notion of the supreme determinacy for *normative* “Islam” of Islamic law that we outlined earlier.

The fundamental deficiency in Hodgson’s schema, then, is that by conceptualizing Islam as a one-dimensional linear scale descending unilaterally from piety to culture it is unable to provide us with a mechanism by which to come to terms with the definitive and multi-dimensional phenomenon of *internal contradiction* outlined in the first part of this book. This is not to say that Hodgson does not *describe* contradiction in his history—obviously, he does so in great detail;¹³⁰ but his means of relating it to “Islam” is to transpose the bulk of contradiction—and with it the major part of human and historical Islam—from the category of Islamic/religious to the category of Islamicate/cultural. One is again reminded here of Laroui’s “principle of elimination”: when in doubt, one might say, throw it out. Relatively little of human and historical Islam falls, for Hodgson, in the domain of “Islamic”; most of it, of necessity, is

¹²⁹ A. Kevin Reinhart, “Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983) 186–203, at 186–187.

¹³⁰ “We must also, of course, be ready to recognize on their own merits the norms of all the sub-traditions that diversely developed Islam—all the contrasting positions that were ‘Islam’ to one group or another,” Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:89.

Islamicate—the concept, “Islamicate” functions as a very large catch-basin of culture for the overspill of a very small reservoir of religion.¹³¹

Indeed, in a statement resonant of the Quaker “Testimony of Simplicity,”¹³² Hodgson sets up culture, “the ideal of *adab* . . . a pattern in the daily round which at best could glow with true beauty” not merely outside, but in *opposition to* the pious core of Islam-proper—which is to say that he sets up the pious core of Islam-proper in opposition to *adab/culture*.

But set over against this tasteful surface was the deeper and more tumultuous realm of spiritual responsiveness expressed in personal piety. For within almost every man or woman, even among the privileged, was a

¹³¹ At various junctures, Hodgson puts forward premises that seem well-suited to making the case for the *unfeasibility* of drawing a line between “religion”/Islam and “culture”/Islamicate, such that one might imagine that he is about to go forward to consider how to conceptualize Islam without the imposition of such a divide. For example:

Not only what may be called the religion proper, then, but the whole social and cultural complex associated with it—indeed, at the most extreme extension, the totality of all the lifeways accepted among any Muslims anywhere—may be looked on as Islam and seen as a self-contained whole, a total context within which daily life has proceeded in all its ramifications. All can, in some sense, be derived as consequent upon the initial posture of *islâm*, of personal submission to God. (Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:75)

Elsewhere he seems to suggest that perhaps the distinction between Islamic and Islamicate need only be made occasionally—although he makes it anything but occasionally:

In some cases, the distinction is unimportant, and the choice between the terms “Islamic” and “Islamicate” may be a matter of emphasis. But on occasion it is essential to point up the distinction between those traditions associated relatively closely with the act of *islâm* and its spiritual implications, and those traditions that were associated with Islam more indirectly, through forming a part of the overall civilization in which Muslims were leaders. (Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:95)

And elsewhere it is not at all easy to disentangle his use of “culture” and “religion” in relation to Islam.

What then is Islam? Can we study it as a meaningful whole? Is it more than the name for a hope and a few common symbols? Clearly yes: but only in the way that any cultural tradition, whatever its internal contradictions, is whole . . . a minimal cultural integrality can be assured . . . so long as there is a common commitment to an initial point of departure which all acknowledge, and to the continuing body of persons which shares that acknowledgement . . . cultural continuity among the Muslims is most visible on the level of what we call ‘religion’ . . . but we will find that this religious unity among Muslims is but one expression of a wider cultural unity. This wider cultural unity is historically, doubtless, the more fundamental. (Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:86–88)

¹³² On Hodgson’s Quakerism, see footnote 116, above.

rebellious spirit inclined to smash all this elegance in the name of ultimate reality.¹³³

To a tasteful Muslim's ear, there is intriguingly Salafi timbre to the above statement about smashing elegance in the name of piety—as if ultimate reality should not be expressed in elegance, and as if elegance is necessarily “surface” and not “deep.” As in the case of the “legal supremacist” conceptualization of “Islam,” Hodgson’s “pious fundamentalist” sliding-scale also serves, however unintentionally, to endorse one *specific* authority claim about the constitution of “Islam” and—although this may surprise the reader—it is none other than the authority claim that is made by contemporary Muslim textual-restrictivists, “fundamentalists,” and Salafists. The restrictivist, “fundamentalist” or Salafi would fully endorse Hodgson’s basic premise:

In studying the history of Muslims, obviously, we need distinct terms for the religious tradition on the one hand and for the more inclusive civilization on the other . . . The terms “Islam” and “Islamic” have often been used in both senses. But these two terms are clearly appropriate only to the realm of religion.¹³⁴

The statements that “*obviously*, we need distinct terms for the religious tradition on the one hand and for the more *inclusive* civilization on the other” and that the terms “Islam” and “Islamic” “*are clearly appropriate* only to the realm of religion” are, once again, in the first instance grounded in no more than an appeal to the purportedly self-evidentiary. Muslim “fundamentalist” and Salafist discourses are similarly founded precisely on the axiomatic claim that true and authentic Islam is to be identified by distinguishing it from the human and historical accretions of Islamic culture and society. However unwittingly, Hodgson’s distinction between Islamic and Islamicate does the same: “culture” and “society,” being Islamicate, are *less Islamic*—that is, less pure and authentic—than “faith” or “religion.” “Quite so,” says the modern fundamentalist, “back to pure and authentic faith we must go, back to the religion, back to Qur’ān and sunnah, back to the law, back to Islam, and *not*—God forbid!—to the Islamicate!”

This delegitimizing potential of the Islamic/Islamicate distinction seem to be lost on scholars who seek to mobilize the latter term as means of charac-

¹³³ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:359.

¹³⁴ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:94.

terizing the phenomenon of inter-Muslim *difference*. Thus, in a volume published under the auspices of the American Academy of Religion with the stated purpose “to advance the integration of Islamic Studies into the general study of religion,” the distinguished scholar Bruce Lawrence calls for the adoption of “Islamicate civilization” as an undergraduate curricular category, thus seeking to *institutionalize* a cognitive difference between Islamic and Islamicate.

To make sense of Islam and Islamicate variables . . . is to invite a *contrast*, between the notions of Islam as a religion or faith system and Islam as a global force or civilization. While Islamicate civilization derives from Islam, the two are neither synonymous nor interchangeable, Islamicate civilization relates to Islam but also exceeds it. Islamicate civilization is about the complex of social relations that comprise the vast historical canvas of the Muslim peoples. While Islamicate civilization projects belief and ritual, doctrine and law, shaped by Islamic perspectives, it is not limited to them. It exceeds them especially in its concern for the often taken-for-granted ways that patterns of conduct emerge. Islamicate civilization is as much about implicit ethical norms [*adab*] as it is about explicit juridical codes [*shari‘ah*]. It is as much about difference between regions and traditions as it is about sameness, collapsing geographical and cultural differences with an umbrella concept such as “ummah.” It is as much about discontinuity over time as it is about continuity . . . The focus on historical forces and social relations embeds an even greater departure from Islam viewed as universal religion with discrete beliefs, rituals and laws. To teach Islamicate civilization is to recognize, explore, and celebrate an Asian dimension in the lived experience of Muslim peoples . . . Most Muslims are Asian, and Islamicate civilization, like Muslim demography, derives its central focus, and determinative profile, from Asia.¹³⁵

Lawrence’s passage brings out in distillation what is wrong with the Islamic/Islamicate distinction. The pre-categorization of Islam as *religion*—and thus as belief, ritual, doctrine, law and *sameness*—is accepted without demur; anything beyond this, anything that exceeds this—that is, *history* and *society*, *ethics* and *difference*—is Islamicate. Thus, it is only when we *exceed Islam*—that is, go beyond Islam—to Islamicate that we find ourselves able to treat history,

¹³⁵ Bruce Lawrence, “Islamicate Civilization: The View from Asia,” in Brannon M. Wheeler (editor), *Teaching Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 61–74, at 62 (italics mine).

society, ethics and difference, and to focus our attention upon the non-Arab world.¹³⁶ On this account, despite a millennium of non-Arab-majority Muslim demography and discourse, it is not that *Islam* derives a central focus and determinative profile from Asia; rather it is *Islamicate* that does. When we say that to study *Islamicate* is to allow for the admission of Asia as an *Islamicate variable*, this seems to imply that if we want to study *Islam*—that is Islam-proper, Islam as religion, Islam as *invariable*—Asia is somewhat more dispensable. It is as if the only way to enfranchise the Muslims of Asia—who, at the latest reckoning are 62% of the Muslim population of the planet¹³⁷—is in the capacity of constituents of the Islamicate; their qualification as constituents for Islam is altogether more tenuous. Lawrence's utilization of Hodgson's concepts manouevres us into a position where Asia is, by definition, simply not central to the constitution of *Islam*—it is only *derivative/Islamicate*. One can readily imagine a good Salafi seizing on this conceptualization to argue that if Asian Muslims want to be less Islamicate and be more Islamic, less cultural and more religious, they should be less Asian and more (seventh-century) Arab. While I have no doubt that this is absolutely *not* the conclusion that Lawrence intends, it is where his and Hodgson's good intentions lead—namely, to the very thing against which Hodgson cautioned: “erroneous usages that reinforce false preconceptions—by far the most mischievous sort of error.”¹³⁸

A further problem that Hodgson was trying to solve was that of how to categorize ideas and behaviours and forms that were evidently related to Islam, but which were thought and performed and produced by people who were not themselves Muslims. Since for Hodgson, faith is the supreme criteria for “Islam/Islamic,” he insists that the “Islamic” can only issue from Muslims: the ideas and behaviours of non-Muslims *cannot* be called Islamic. Hence he proposed “Islamicate” both for “non-religious works produced by Muslims, as well as works produced by non-Muslims living in societies dominated by Muslims.”¹³⁹ But this is directly contrary to conceptualizations held by Muslims themselves: not only did Muslims *consciously* constitute (the

¹³⁶ Elsewhere Lawrence says: “Though culture is not religion, they are interactive and often inseparable. The best neologism to make sense of the elision for Muslims is ‘Islamicate culture,’” Lawrence, “Muslim Cosmopolitanism,” 20. But if they are “often inseparable,” why begin by categorically separating them, and then why call the term by which you are making the *separation* a term of *elision* (i.e., removal of separation)?

¹³⁷ The Pew Research Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010–2030*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-regional-asia.aspx>.

¹³⁸ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:60.

¹³⁹ See Michael Cooperson, “Culture,” in Jamal J. Elias (editor), *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2010, 111–122, at 121.

object of) their faith by incorporating and synthesizing the ideas and behaviours of non-Muslims (human and historical Islam is arguably almost as Neo-Platonic as it is Muḥammadan); the God of Islam Himself identifies Judaism and Christianity as superannuated versions of the same Divine statement that He Communicated to Muhammad (rather in the way that, while Windows 3.0 is a superannuated version of Windows 8.0, they are both Windows nonetheless): as Kenneth Cragg duly notes, “The role of Islam in relation to all other faiths is to prune, correct, purge and complete them.”¹⁴⁰ Even today, a commonplace diagnosis by Muslim modernists in explaining the advance of the West and the backwardness of Muslims is that Western societies have applied and enacted the true substance and spirit of the principles of Islam (egalitarianism, social justice, rational inquiry, etc.) better than have Muslims themselves, *despite* the monopoly on “faith” being held by Muslims. The success of non-Muslims is seen as a consequence of their behaving Islamically in spite of their lack of faith (this position is expressed in the declaration popularly attributed to a founding figure of modernist Islam, Muḥammad ‘Abduh [1849–1905] after his visit to Europe: “In France I saw Islam but no Muslims; in Egypt I see Muslims but no Islam”).¹⁴¹ Pace Hodgson, we are in no way being *faithful* to Islam by insisting that Islamic statements can only be made by Muslims—and even then, only by Muslims when they are being faithful. Further, to restrict the term “Islamic” to acts by Muslims is to limit the claim of the human and historical phenomenon of Islam to any matters that pass out of the Muslim community—irrespective of the meanings and values inscribed in those matters. Thus, in Hodgson’s terms the great Jewish figure Mūsā b. Maymūn/Maimonides was not an *Islamic* intellectual but an *Islamicate* one. Now, while in terms of “faith” Maimonides was a Jew, his ideas were formulated in the discursive context, dialectical framework, and conceptual vocabulary of Islamic philosophy, *kalām*-theology, and *fiqh*-jurisprudence. Sarah Pessin concludes her study of “The Influence of Islamic Thought on Maimonides” with the statement “As is clear from the representative quotes from Islamic sources cited throughout . . . understanding the Islamic philosophical context of the Guide is key for understanding the intricacies of Maimonides’ thought.”¹⁴² More than one

¹⁴⁰ Kenneth Cragg, *The House of Islam*, Belmont: Wadsworth, 1975 (2nd edition), 5–6.

¹⁴¹ There is no evidence that Muḥammad ‘Abduh ever made this statement; my point is that the fact that it is popularly cited from him shows an interest on the part of the modernist Muslim proponents of this idea to legitimate it by attributing it to the foundational Arab figure of modernist Islam.

¹⁴² Sarah Pessin, “The Influence of Islamic Thought on Maimonides,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/maimonides-islamic/>.

scholar has “argued for a substantial influence of Muslim law (*fiqh*) on Maimonides’ jurisprudence.”¹⁴³ In terms of *faith*, Maimonides was not Muslim, but in terms of structure, content, and *meaning*, much of his discourse is as Islamic as, say, Avicenna’s is Neo-Platonic (and we do not say that Avicenna, or anyone else for that matter, is Neo-Platonicate). This is a point to which we shall return in Chapter 6.¹⁴⁴

Despite these problems, some might feel that there is, nonetheless, something intuitively appealing about Hodgson’s distinction between “Islam” and “Islamicate,” and that we should seek to salvage the schema in some way or form. My point though—and it is to this end that a critique of Hodgson serves as heuristic—is that *any* such conceptualization of Islam that is based on identifying an Islam-concentrate whose presence in greater or lesser dilution may then be measured in some sort of litmus test inevitably leaves us with the problem of determining when it is that a given phenomenon is characterized by a sufficient quantum of the concentrate “Islam” to be “Islamic” and when it is not. In the absence of universally accepted criterion by which to distinguish the Islamic from the Islamicate, we—Muslims and Unbelievers alike—will, like Hodgson, inevitably fall back onto our own respective preconceptions and predilections to determine what that concentrate is.

The above critique of Hodgson’s great thesis has, I hope, cast into relief the profound difficulties that arise when we seek to conceptualize Islam by distinguishing between the apparently self-evident categories of “religion” and “culture.” And while it is the case that Hodgson wrote in 1962, before his usage of the terms “religion” and “culture” was rendered moot by fact of the subsequent revising and reconstituting of each of the terms, primarily in the scholarly discourse of anthropology, and later in the field of the study of religion—the operation being somewhat more successful in the case of “culture” than in the case of “religion”—the analytical and conceptual problems arising from the resort to these primary categories of explanation, and the powerful grip exercised by them, is undiminished, as we shall see in what follows.

¹⁴³ Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World; Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, 66.

¹⁴⁴ One might think that, between “Islamic” and “Islamicate,” Hodgson has all possible terrain well-covered. But Carla Bellamy argues in her study of Sufi shrines in India where both Hindus and Muslims are engaged in religious activity that, on the one hand, the fact of the activity being religious (rather than cultural) would require it to be classified as Islamic, but on the other hand, the fact that Hindus are involved would require it to be classified as Islamicate—but since it cannot be classified as both, she is led to “suggest *dargāh* culture is neither Islamic nor Islamicate,” Carla Bellamy, *The Powerful Ephemeral: Everyday Healing in an Ambiguously Islamic Place*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 10.

Religion and Secular, Sacred and Profane, Theocentric and Anthropocentric, Total Social Fact, Family Resemblance

It is a mistake to think of the Islamic as one of the several ways of being religious. Rather, for fourteen centuries the Islamic has been one of the salient ways of being human.

—Wilfred Cantwell Smith¹

THE MOST OBVIOUS CONCEPTUALIZATION of Islam in the received terms both of scholarly and of popular analysis—namely, Islam as “religion”—has been considerably complicated, if not undermined outright, as the category of “religion” has (over the last two decades) been subjected to a severe—and, in my view, sound and instructive—interrogation and deconstruction in the scholarly discourse to the point that the meaningfulness and validity of the received category of “religion” has been put into question. It is not my purpose here to reprise in detail the now widely-available critique of “religion”: rather, I should like to highlight the implications for the conceptualization of Islam that arise from some of its foundational insights.²

¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Islamic History as a Concept,” in William Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies*, The Hague: Mouton, 1981, 3–25, at 12.

² I direct the reader to foundational works of this important critical trajectory: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; Timothy Fitzgerald, “A Critique of ‘Religion’ as a Cross-Cultural Category,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997) 91–110, the ideas in which are fleshed out further in Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003 (translated from *L’Occident et la religion: Mythes, science et idéologie*, Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1998); and the neglected articles of Joachim Matthes, “Religion in the Social Sciences: A Socio-Epistemological Critique,” *Akademika* 56 (2000) 85–105, which draws on Joachim Matthes, “Was ist anders an Anderen Religionen? Anmerkungen zentralistischen Organisation des religionssoziologischen Denkens,” in Jörg Bergmann, Alois Hahn and Thomas Luckmann (editors), *Religion und Kultur*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993, 16–30. Important subsequent works include: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions; Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civil-*

Fundamental here are the consequences of the fact that the concept and term “religion” as it is used today in the language of modern analysis—both by scholars and by laymen—emerged in the wake of the devastating European “Wars of Religion” (1530–1630) as a product of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Europe. “Religion” was articulated as instrument and expression of the social and intellectual struggle of Europeans to free themselves from the monopoly of the totalizing truth-claims that were made by and exercised from the social, political, intellectual and material *institution* of the Christian Church.³ To liberate themselves from their captivity in the truth-monopoly claimed by the Christian episteme and to liberate themselves from the institutional site of the social, political and economic operation of that Christian episteme, the practitioners of European Enlightenment thought and politics had to *carve out* for themselves a new and independent social and epistemological truth-space for “non-religion.” This carving-out of a new, autonomous, and necessarily “non-religious” space was accomplished by means of demarcating—we might say, “carving-in”—two new and restricted spaces for “religion,” one institutional and one private, and by effectively *quarantining* “religion” in those new, restricted spaces. The first of these two spaces is the Church which, existing already in the European mind as a concept and in European society as an institution, was readily available for sequestration and re-configuration—and was, thus, duly re-constituted as the legitimate and restricted communal domain-of-first-instance for the social and praxial confinement of what would henceforth be “religion.” The second domain to which “religion” was consigned was and is the private space of personal belief or individual conscience and morals, which was constituted as the legitimate domain for the intellectual and ethical confinement of religion. In other words, the long-Enlightenment re-constitution and re-emplotment of the space and content of “religion” took place *in relation to and in distinction from*

ity and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation*, New York City: Columbia University Press, 2009.

³ The classic study illustrating the grip of the Christian episteme upon pre-Enlightenment social and intellectual space is Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (translated from the French original by Beatrice Gottlieb, first published at Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1942), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982: “Christianity was the very air one breathed in what we call Europe and what was then Christendom. It was the atmosphere in which a man lived out his entire life . . . Today we make a choice to be Christian or not. There was no choice in the sixteenth century. One was a Christian in fact. One’s thoughts could wander far from Christ, but these were plays of fancy, without the living support of reality . . . From birth to death stretched a long chain of ceremonies, traditions, customs, and observances, all of them Christian or Christianized, and these bound a man in spite of himself, held him captive even if he claimed to be free,” Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief*, 336.

the constitution and emplotment of “secular.” The mutually-defining and mutually-accompanying binary categories of “religion/religious” and “secular” serve to order and make sense of the world by assigning objects to their *universally right-ful* semantic places (that is, to where they belong and to what they mean by universal right), thereby reducing or altogether eliminating the possibilities of conceiving of *alternative local or universal arrangements of rights and meaning* proceeding from paradigms that do not make the binary religious-secular distinction in which “secular” is that space and those discourses in which the epistemology of the “religious” does not apply, and “religious” is that space and those discourses in which the epistemology of the “secular” does not apply. This New Truth-World Order, with its re-constitution and re-emplotment of religion and non-religion was successfully established and naturalized as a defining constitutive element of the infrastructure and cosmology of the Western Modern; that is to say, of the way in which the Western Modern conceives of and speaks about the natural order of a world in which the “religious” is *self-evidently distinguishable* from the “non-religious.” The Western Modern is a *Weltanschauung* that constrains us to think in certain ways and with certain categories, as well as *not* to think in certain ways and to *not* think without certain categories. To speak of “religion” today is simultaneously to do two things: to constitute objects as “religions” by modeling them on the Christian-European historical experience (and, thus, on Christianity) as well as to assume the validity of and speak in terms of the necessary accompanying binary category “secular.”

Modern Western “reification” of religion (to use Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s famous term)—that is, “mentally making religion into a thing, gradually coming to conceive it as an objective, systematic entity”⁴—required the identification and stabilization of the objective component elements that identify and constitute *religion*. The elements that were identified as comprising and signalling the category of religion arose from the fact that the event of the Western Enlightenment Modern took place in and against Christian epistemology and Christian institution. Four elements are pre-eminent among these stabilizing *measures of religion*. First: religion is habitually seen as empirically unverifiable faith in the supernatural or transcendental—as distinct from empirical observation of verifiable facts in the natural, which we call “science.” Second: religion is habitually seen as related to specialized institutions: especially with a specialized social institution, namely, the church, or something like it; and with a specialized textual institution, namely, scripture; and with the production by institutionally-authorized interpreters—that is, by a clergy,

⁴ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 51.

or something like them—by their institutionalized and authorized reading of scripture of prescriptive and proscriptive institutional truths—that is, creeds and laws. Third: religion is habitually identified with the value of the *sacred* as distinct from the *profane*.⁵ Fourth: religion is habitually identified with the performance of acts of self- and communal-*constitution* in terms of a higher power that is the object of faith and source of the the sacred, as well as self- and communal-*subjection* to a higher power that is the object of faith and source of the the sacred—with *piety* and *worship*—particularly the ritual performance of prayer for divine intervention.⁶ The truth-claims of religion—that is, truth-claims arising from empirically unverifiable engagement with the domain of faith in the supernatural, from the domain of the sacred as distinct

⁵ On the sacred/profane distinction, see later in this chapter.

⁶ Definitions, descriptions, and categories of definitions and descriptions of religion have been laid out and interrogated by Craig Martin. These include “Religion as a ‘belief system,’” “Religion as something that specifically concerns ‘supernatural matters,’” “Religion as ‘matters of faith,’” “Religion as concerning the ‘meaning of life,’” “Religion as concerning ‘spirituality’ or ‘spiritual well-being,’” ‘Religion as ‘communal institutions oriented around a set of beliefs, ritual practices, and ethical or social norms.’” See also the distinction between “monothetic definitions” that “provide a list of necessary and sufficient features or common properties that delimit something as part of a class” (which includes the foregoing), and “polythetic definitions” which “by contrast, do not enumerate a list of features or properties that delimit something as part of a class.” Martin lists three types of polythetic definitions. “The first type of polythetic use of a word is one that provides key properties, but does not describe them as necessary and sufficient. For example William P. Alston ‘defines’ religion as having *some or most* of the following: 1. Belief in one or more supernatural beings. 2. A distinction between sacred and profane objects. 3. Ritual acts focused on these objects. 4. A moral code believed to have been sanctioned by the god(s). 5. Religious feelings (awe, mystery, etc) that tend to be aroused by the sacred objects and during rituals. 6. Prayer and other forms of communicative conduct concerning the gods. 7. A world-view according adherents a significant place in the universe. 8. A more or less comprehensive organization of one’s life based on the world view. 9. An organization bound together by 1” (these are cited by Martin from William P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1964, 88). Martin adds that “the second type of polythetic use of a word is the ‘family resemblance’ use by Ludwig Wittgenstein” (for a critique of which see later in this chapter). Martin proposes “a third type of polythetic use of a term, which I call the ‘grab-bag use,’” which “is one that simply collects dissimilar things and puts them together.” See Craig Martin, “Delimiting Religion,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religions* 21 (2009) 157–176, at 162–166. This article forms the first chapter of Craig Martin, *Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion and the Private Sphere*, London: Equinox, 2010. It is instructive to note the 1957 ruling of the California Court of Appeals in *Fellowship of Humanity v. County of Alameda*, which presented four criteria for a group to qualify for the title of “religion”: “(1) A belief, not necessarily referring to supernatural powers; (2) a cult, involving a gregarious association openly expressing the belief; (3) a system of moral practice directly resulting from adherence to the belief; and (4) an organization within the cult designed to observe the ‘tenets of belief.’” *Fellowship of Humanity v. Co. Alameda* (1957), 153 Cal. App. 2d 673, 315 P. 2d 394, cited in Massimo Introvigne, “Religion as Claim: Social and Legal Controversies,” in Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk (editors), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999, 41–72, at 45.

from the profane, from the engagement of specialists with text of scripture and of scriptural discourses issuing in prescription and proscription of religious truths, from the ritual performance of piety—are thus allowed legitimately to operate in these demarcated spaces of the Church and of the private, personal conscience of the individual member of the communion of the Church. The remainder of *liberated* thought-territory becomes the public space of the non-religious or *secular* in which other epistemic claims hold sway: these secular claims *ipso facto* are (understood to be) non-scriptural, non-pious, non-spiritual, non-sacred, and engaged with the rational or empirically-verifiable.⁷ In sum, the category of “religion” emerged cast in the mould of a particular historical context and experience: that of historical European Christianity cut down to size and put in its place by the Enlightenment. Post-Enlightenment European Christianity with its socio-political location constitutive of modernity became the archetype for the modern universal category of “religion.”

Thus, the term “religion” is commonly used in modern language by both scholars and laymen as an effectively *self-evident universal category* that *picks out* a set of phenomena related to belief in the supernatural, or to faith in that which cannot be empirically verified, or to questions about the ultimate meaning of existence, and identifies as (a) religion a social, intellectual, institutional, experiential, praxial, ritual and moral complex organized around, proceeding from or expressive of commitments in regard to these matters. Modern discourse habitually identifies certain specific phenomena as “religion,” such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Roman religion, Egyptian religion, *etcetera*, on the basis that the category “religion” enables us to identify these specific configurations as expressive of the same universal-historical phenomenon. These phenomena are identified as the *same thing*, namely, “religion,” taking place in different ways and forms across human societies in both the past and the present.

A crucial problem, however, with the concept of “religion” is that it is not at all clear what it is that distinguishes those things which we commonly *include* in the category of religion—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism,

⁷ As Talal Asad has said, “Religion was gradually compelled to concede the domain of public power to the constitutional state, and of public truth to natural science . . . in this movement we have the construction of religion as a new historical object; anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief-statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one’s spare time. This construction of religion ensures that it is part of what is *inessential* to our common politics, economy, science and morality.” Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 207. Elsewhere, Asad characterizes the “function” of secularism as having been to “define ‘religions’ in the plural as a species of (non-rational) belief.” Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic,” 221.

etcetera—from those things which we commonly do not identify as religion, such as Capitalism, Communism, Atheism, Secularism, Liberal Democracy, the Nation-State, *etcetera*. After all, these latter are all grounded in faith in such empirically-unverifiable and pseudo-rational transcendental truths as the natural equality of humans, exemplified in the phrase, “We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that all men are created equal”;⁸ or in the virtue of free markets that are corrected by an Invisible Hand (as that righteous missionary of the religion of Capitalism, *The Economist*, put it as long ago as 1843, “Free trade is itself a good, like virtue, holiness and righteousness, to be loved, admired, honoured and steadfastly adopted, for its own sake though all the rest of the world should love restrictions and prohibitions, which are of themselves evils, like vice and crime, to be hated and abhorred under all circumstances and at all times”);⁹ or in absolute values either of the sacrality or profanity of private property, “the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property”;¹⁰ or in ritual acts of individual and collective human self-constitution by and self-subjection to the interventionary power of those legal-fictional realities that Robert Wuthnow called “the most powerful gods we experience in our everyday lives—the sovereign nation-states of the modern world.”¹¹ Our definitive exclusion of these phenomena from the category of “religion” is squarely a symptom of the success of thought-constraints that the ordering of the world effected by the modern paradigm of “religion” has imposed upon us, its modern subjects. In this ordering of the world, those truth-claims that the modern project has sought to legitimate as properly constitutive of *public political* norms—in distinction from *private religious* norms—such as those of Liberal Democracy, Secularism, Capitalism, Communism, *etcetera*, are categorically *not* seen as religion(s). As Timothy Fitzgerald has argued, it is precisely the fact that “the Leviathan of the Nation-State and the Great Bull of Capital were both generated by the same historical processes that gave us Enlightenment Reason” that produced a matrix of mutually implicated cognitive relations in and by which Enlightenment Reason restrains us from seeing that “worship of capital, disguised as a science of economics, is an example of what anthropologists and religionists used to call animism—belief in the independent auton-

⁸ Declaration of Independence, In Congress, July 4 1776, The unanimous declaration of the thirteen united states of America.

⁹ Cited in Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order; Explorations in Cultural Analysis*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 251.

¹⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Collected Works, Volume 6*, New York: International Publishers, 1976, 498.

¹¹ Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 264.

omy of the products of the collective imagination.”¹² It is on the basis of issues such as the foregoing that Fitzgerald has forcefully stated the thesis that “Religion is too clumsy a concept . . . what counts as religion and what counts as non-religion is fraught with confusions¹³ . . . The word ‘religion’ . . . picks out nothing distinctive and it clarifies nothing. It merely distorts the field.”¹⁴

One response to this deficiency in the constitution of the concept of “religion” is the proposal by several scholars to discard its use—with the note that nothing will be lost since the phenomena that “religion” purports to pick out can more accurately be picked out by terms such as “piety,” “worship,” and “soteriology.”¹⁵ Alternatively, we could committedly and deliberately expand the use of the term “religion” to designate and analyze truth-phenomena, such as those noted above, that the logic of the concept of “religion” fully encompasses—but that the politics of the concept of “religion” currently exclude. The most famous scholarly attempt to apply “religion” to (some) of the above phenomena is probably Robert Bellah’s positing of “civil religion” as the appropriate term to capture “a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere . . . expressed in . . . a collection of beliefs, symbols and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity.” Bellah called this “religion” because, he said “there seems no other word for it”¹⁶—but his intervention was unsuccessful and, nearly fifty years on, I am not aware of the regular institutional presence of professorships for the study of nationalism and the nation-state, or of capital-

¹² Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, x. And elsewhere: “The secular is itself a sphere of transcendental values, but the invention of religion as the locus of the transcendent serves to disguise this and strengthen the illusion that the secular is simply the real world seen aright in all its self-evident factuality,” Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 15.

¹³ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 153. Massimo Introvigne’s characterization of the US Internal Revenue Service’s definition of religion as “comparable to the well-known old American definition of pornography: ‘I know it when I see it,’” is not far off as regards the academy’s conceptualization of religion—at least in its institutional organization; Introvigne, “Religion as Claim,” 67.

¹⁴ Fitzgerald, “A Critique of ‘Religion,’” 93.

¹⁵ Perhaps the first such call from within the academy was that of Wilfred Cantwell Smith: “The word ‘religion’ has had many meanings; it . . . would better be dropped. The only effective significance that can reasonably be attributed to the term is that of ‘religiousness,’ but for this generic abstraction, other words are available—we could rehabilitate perhaps the venerable term ‘piety’ . . . Certainly much would be gained if everyone who were tempted, from habit, to use the word ‘religion’ would stop to clarify to himself just what it was to which he wished to refer. Once he had done this, it is doubtful that he would then go on to use it anyway; especially if he hoped to clarify it also to his hearer or reader. I am bold enough to speculate whether these terms will not in fact have disappeared from serious writing and careful speech within twenty-five years,” Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 194–195.

¹⁶ See Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96.1 (Winter 1967) 1–21, at 4, and 8.

ism, secularism, democracy, *etcetera*, or, for that matter, for the study of Civil Religion, alongside those for Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, *etcetera* in university departments that teach, study and constitute the field of Study of Religion. Rather, these things are categorized as *distinct* from religion: one studies “religion *and* politics,” or “religion *and* capitalism,” or “religion *and* secularism.” Symptomatically of this, Sharon Siddique notes the “inadequacies of [the] concept ‘religion’ to the task of conceptualizing contemporary Islam” since “regarding Islam as merely ‘religion’ leaves unanalyzed the political, economic, legal and perhaps social aspects of Islam as a religion.” She goes on to add that “the dilemma here naturally does not lie with Islam, but rather with Western definitions and conceptualizations of religion.” Since “Islam . . . contains also the formulation for a social, political and economic order,” Siddique suggests that “in the context of conceptualizing contemporary Islam, it is more fruitful to deal with Islam as ideology, rather than Islam as religion.”¹⁷ But the disqualification of the term “religion” as conceptually inappropriate to “the formulation for a social, political and economic order,” and its replacement by “ideology” serves only to reinforce the terms of the normative modeling of the modern world whereby private religion *per definitionem* cannot meddle in the public secular, with the consequence that if it makes a claim to do so, it *per definitionem* makes of itself something other than religion. We are thereby prevented from locating the meaningful similarities between those truth-phenomena we label as “religion,” and those—such as nationalism, capitalism, communism, *etcetera*—that, for no good reason, we do not call “religion,” but instead call “ideology” and other things.¹⁸

Half-a-century before Bellah, Antonio Gramsci proposed from his prison cell that we conceive of “religion taken not in the confessional sense but in the secular sense of a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct,” and then went on to ask, “Why call this unity of faith ‘religion’ and not ‘ideology,’ or even ‘politics’?”¹⁹ Certainly, if

¹⁷ Siddique, “Conceptualizing Contemporary Islam,” 203–205.

¹⁸ The definitional and historical imprecisions and complexities of the term “ideology” are well treated in Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, London: Verso, 1991, at 1–62. For an instance of the pejorative use of the term ‘ideology’ to characterize modern (as opposed to ‘traditional’) Muslims’ understandings of Islam, see Joseph E. B. Lumbard, “The Decline of Knowledge and the Rise of Ideology in the Modern Islamic World,” in Joseph E. B. Lumbard (editor), *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars*, Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009, 39–77.

¹⁹ Antonio Gramsci, “The Study of Philosophy,” in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, 319–377, at 326. There is a striking similarity between Gramsci’s characterization of politics as religion, and Clifford Geertz’s later definition of religion, “Religious sym-

this rank inconsistency were to be rectified—that is, if rather than making a categorical distinction between “religion” and “ideology,” or between “religion” and “politics,” we recognize, with Gramsci, that these phenomena fall into the same category—this reconceptualization and reconstitution of the concept of religion would go a long way towards freeing the category of “religion” from its present embeddedness and complicity in the normativity of the modern.²⁰ Indeed such a reconceptualization might well render “religion” as a valid and coherent category of human and historical analysis instead of what it presently is: a rehearsed rhetorical device that is complicit in the perpetuation, naturalization and universalization of the conceptual orthodoxy

bols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other,” Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, 90 (although Geertz maintains the distinction between religion and politics).

²⁰ Instead, the academy organizes these truths in terms of separate categories, for example “Religion and Politics.” While “Political Islam” or “Islam and Gender” are understood as natural and self-evident subjects for an academic program in Study of Religion, I have never seen “Secular Democracy,” “The Nation-State,” or “Liberalism and Gender” treated as *religion* in the curricula of the universities with which I am familiar. Effectively, the term “civil religion” has been understood to mean that while there is a similarity, “civil religions” are not religion “proper,” whereas Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. (somehow self-evidently) are. “Civil religion,” in other words, has become a category that qualifies its subject matter as “religion” by partially disqualifying it at the same time. For example, Bryan S. Turner concludes a discussion wherein he says, “The American Way of Life is . . . a separate and independent religion with its own beliefs, rituals and saints,” by *distinguishing* between the American Way of Life and “religious practice and institutions which operate *alongside* loyalty to the flag, attachment to Independence Day rituals and emotional commitment to such sacred places as the Arlington National Cemetery.” He thus speaks of “the *quasi*-religious rituals of the civil religion,” Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, London: Sage Publications, 1991 (2nd edition), 54–55. It is instructive that Bellah himself finally abandoned the use of the term, having become “more and more concerned . . . that the whole issue was bogging down into arguments over definition and that substance was being overlooked,” Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991 (2nd edition), x. Craig Martin—with whom I agree when he says, “What properties or resemblances make Christianity and Hinduism ‘religions,’ but not American nationalism? I can think of none”—identifies the problem as lying with the “colloquial use of the term religion,” Martin, “Delimiting Religion,” 166. My point is that the colloquial use of the term/category “religion” is also the dominant intellectual, academic, and institutional use and category of the term/category “religion.” Timothy Fitzgerald has criticized the academy for transforming “a modern ideological category . . . by ritual repetition such that it seems as though it is in the nature of things” and for “generating the myth of the religious–secular distinction as objective knowledge achieved through disinterested rational procedures,” Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 10. The institutional field of Study of Religion remains, on the whole, insufficiently attentive to Markus Dressler’s admonition: “Scholarly work . . . should not turn into an uncritical tool for the reification of vernacular patterns of hegemony, but instead be conscious and critical of the work of its concepts, and especially so if these concepts are involved in vernacular politics,” Markus Dressler, “How to Conceptualize Inner-Islamic Plurality/Difference: ‘Heterodoxy’ and ‘Syncretism’ in the Writings of Mehmet F. Köprülü (1890–1966),” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37 (2010) 241–260, at 255.

the modern. The problem, of course, lies not merely in the fact our own analytical operations and modes of thinking are embedded and implicated in the larger norms of the modern and its conceptual vocabulary of which “religion” is a crucial semantic component and taxonomical principle, but that to use “religion” in the sense proposed by Gramsci would precisely result in the collapsing of the very constitutive structures of the modern division (religion and secular) that the term has been set up to institutionalize and perpetuate.

Nowhere is the social and political power of the constitutive vocabulary of the modern condition better seen than in the adoption of the intellectual category and social phenomenon of “religion” by societies in which no such category had existed prior to the encounter with the Western Modern. As the militarized project of European capitalist imperialism came to colonize directly, or otherwise to coerce and impress itself upon the rest of the peoples of the planet, so did the component conceptual paradigms of the Western Modern impress themselves powerfully and universally upon non-Europeans as part and parcel of the physical and cognitive condition of Modernity to which they were now subjects—including this notion of *religion*. This was carried out, not only by the Western (Orientalist) practitioners of the universalizing Modern-Western discourse who, in their analytical encounter with non-post-Enlightenment-Christian societies, constituted the social, intellectual and cultural phenomena of those societies in the analytical terms that made sense to the Modern West, but also by subject Orientals who remade themselves as *moderns* in and on the terms of Western Modernity. Thus, the societies of the planet were identified—either by Orientalists or by Orientals—as having *religion* and were analytically, politically, socially, and cognitively re-ordered by Modern Western discourse in terms of its idea of *religion*; this despite the fact that the languages in which these societies historically conceptualized themselves did not possess an idea equivalent to that of Modern Western religion. Two examples are most readily forwarded as instances of the adoption and self-imposition by Modern Orientals of the category of religion. One is the invention by the self-consciously modernizing Meiji Japanese state of the Japanese-language term “religion”—“The term *religion*, translated as *shūkyō*, ‘sectarian teachings,’ was introduced into Japanese in the 1860s as part of treaties guaranteeing the rights of resident foreigners”;²¹ followed by the institutionalization in law of sect-Shinto Buddhism as (private) religion, differentiated from state-Shinto Buddhism as national (public)

²¹ Sarah Thal, “A Religion That Was Not a Religion: The Creation of Modern Shinto in Nineteenth-Century Japan,” in Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof (editors), *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002, 100–114, at 101.

ideology;²² followed, eventually, by the constitutional imposition by the post-1945 United States occupation of the category of “religion”/*shūkyō* to all spaces, discourses and practices of Shinto.²³ The other is the mobilization by self-consciously modernizing Indian colonial subjects of the Sanskrit term *dharma* as an equivalent to the English (colonial) term “religion,” and their “invention” of a “religion” called Hinduism constituted in terms of the characteristics of the category of religion recognizable to their Christian European colonial masters, such as scripture and soteriology, rather than on the fact—historically central to society in India but categorically anomalous to the Modern Western notion of “religion”—of the social relations of the caste system being the primary element constitutive of being a Hindu. As Timothy Fitzgerald points out in a critique of standard scholarly presentations of Hinduism, the fact that a “Hindu is a Hindu not because he accepts certain doctrines or philosophies but because he is a member of a caste” is, in the analytical discourse of the modern concept of religion, “acknowledged but then sidestepped.”²⁴ This is because in order for a religion to be *religion* it

²² “During the Meiji Restoration in the second half of the 19th century, however, an attempt was made to re-shape the Japanese state and society according to the European model. Since European societies of this time had something called ‘religion’, it was assumed that Japanese society, in its effort to ‘modernise’ itself, should also have something similar. A ministry was founded to determine the ‘religious’ foundation of a modern Japanese nation state, and Shintoism was proclaimed to be its basic ‘religion’. To serve this function, Shintoism . . . had to be institutionalised . . . Under a concept of ‘religion’ derived from the European Christian tradition, a social and cultural scenario was created which, henceforth, could be identified, in the Western perspective, as ‘religion’ bearing characteristics such as a quasi-church structure, a pattern of ‘belonging’ to this church by observing certain ritual patterns, and even a notion of ‘syncretism’ as it had been developed in the Western Christian tradition . . . Since this new ‘religious’ order was introduced from above, it shaped the ‘official’ scenario of ‘religion’ in Japan, much to the liking of Western social scientists who now find in Japan a lot of indicators of ‘religion’ familiar to them,” Matthes, “Religion in the Social Sciences,” 97–98. Matthes is summarizing here the pioneering work done by Shingo Shimada; see Jürgen Straub and Shingo Shimada, “Relationale Hermeneutik im Kontext interkulturellen Verstehens: Probleme universalistischer Bergriffsbildung in den Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften erörtert am Beispiel ‘Religion,’” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 47 (1999) 449–477. On the subsequent elaboration of a distinction in Japan between private “religion” and public “ideology,” see Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 164–180.

²³ On the history of “religion” in Japan, see also Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; William P. Woodward, *The Allied Occupation of Japan 1945–1952 and Japanese Religions*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972; and more recently, Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

²⁴ Fitzgerald is here reviewing a classic textbook on Hinduism: “The editors acknowledge the problem of caste in this way: ‘A Hindu is a Hindu not because he accepts certain doctrines or philosophies but because he is a member of a caste.’ Given the actual contents of the book, this is a surprising admission. There are less than three pages on caste. The section on caste is no longer than the average length of the other fifty-two sections and is thus given the same importance as, for instance, ‘Orthodox Philosophy 1,’ ‘Orthodox Philosophy 2,’ ‘Orthodox Philosophy

must be made to correspond to the fullest extent possible to the newly-minted post-Enlightenment European Christian model. In other words, in order to be *religion*, Shinto, Hinduism, *etcetera* have to be made, to the extent possible, to map meaningfully onto the structures and terrain of post-Enlightenment Christianity and its spatial and epistemological relationship with the rest of society and polity, rather than to map onto their own structures, terrain, and spatial and epistemological relationships—and if their own terrain proves incongruous with modular “religion,” that incongruity is duly acknowledged but sidestepped in the paramount interest of moving analytically forward.

A similar operation has been carried out with regard to Islam whereby the Qur’anic term *al-dīn* by which the Qur’ān glosses *al-islām*—“The *dīn* with God is *al-islām*,”²⁵ “Today, I have perfected your *dīn* for you, and have completed My Blessing upon you: and have willed *al-islām* as your *dīn*,”²⁶ “He who goes in search of other than *al-islām* as *dīn*: it will not be accepted from him”²⁷—is routinely translated, in both scholarly and popular modern discourses, as “religion”; that is, “The religion with God is Islam,” “Today, I have perfected my religion for you.” This is despite the widespread recognition that the two concepts are not congruent. This much was clear to W. Montgomery Watt:

. . . “the true religion with God is Islam”! The word translated “religion” is *dīn*, which in Arabic commonly refers to *a whole way of life* . . . which permeates the whole fabric of society in a way of which men are conscious. It is—all in one—theological dogma, forms of worship, political

3.’ or ‘The Religion of the Rig Veda,’ or any one of such outstanding figures as Ram Mohum Roy, Dayandada Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Debendranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Generally speaking, ideology and ritual are described for their theological and soteriological significance, as though the salvation of the individual soul is central and fundamental and Hinduism exists as a religious philosophy that has universal relevance and only contingently happens to be practiced in India. The centrality of Hinduism as an ideology belonging to the social relations of a particular group or set of groups is acknowledged but then sidestepped. Virtually everything that sociology has revealed about Hinduism is ignored in the quest for a soteriological belief system, a world religion that transcends any particular social group. The fundamental sense in which religion is group-tied is ignored.” See the discussion in Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 128–155; the quotation is at 136–137. There is an extensive debate on the “Is Hinduism a Religion?” question, the foundational stage of which is now conveniently summarized in the selections edited by J. E. Llewellyn, *Defining Hinduism*, New York: Routledge, 2005.

²⁵ *inna al-dīna 'inda Allāhi al-islām*, Qur'ān 3:19 Āl 'Imrān.

²⁶ *al-yawma akmalta la-kum dina-kum wa tammamtu 'alay-kum ni'mat-i wa radaytu la-kum al-islāma dīnan*, Qur'ān 5:3 al-Mā'idah.

²⁷ *wa man yabtaghi ghayra al-islāma dīnan fa-lan yuqbala min-hu*, Qur'ān 3:85 Āl 'Imrān.

theory, and a detailed code of conduct, including even matters which the European would classify as hygiene or etiquette.²⁸

Every student of Islam will recognize as commonplace Watt's statement that Islam is not so much a "religion" as "a whole way of life." My point, however, is that this is precisely one of those commonplaces that are routinely stated without due consideration of its *meaning* or *consequence* for conceptualization or analysis: it is, precisely, "acknowledged but then sidestepped." After all, if Islam is *not* (quite) religion, or if religion is not (quite) Islam—then why, in the interest of good conceptual and analytical clarity, call it "religion"? And if we don't think that "a whole way of life" is an accurate or productive concept, why don't we think of something else?²⁹ In my view, when we moderns unconsideredly think of Islam as "religion," we encourage ourselves to think, in the first instance, of Islam as "doing" what we moderns know religion "does." Concomitantly, we do not encourage ourselves to think of those things that Islam "does" that do *not* readily fall within the rubric and portfolio and activity of religion, and thus do not encourage ourselves to conceptualize Islam in terms of the implications and consequences of its incongruences to religion.

The tendency is, instead, to regard Islam somehow as the most naturally equivalent non-Christian candidate to the modern Western category of religion. Thus, a sense of analytical relief is palpable in the following passage from a recent introductory textbook to Islam:

Islam may sometimes seem very different from Christianity, but the differences between Islam and Christianity pale into insignificance when

²⁸ Watt, *What Is Islam?* 3 (italics mine).

²⁹ Watt's recognition that *din* is different to "religion" is seen in his own conceptual move to remodel universal religion—and thus, by implication, Christianity—in what he saw as terms "closer to the Muslim conception of *din* than to the usual occidental conception." Thus, "Religion . . . may be said to have an important function in the life of society; it may be said to enable a society to become aware of itself and of its own deepest nature. Religion does this by providing a basic plan into which are integrated all the activities of the society, economic, social, intellectual. In the higher religions, this basic plan is expressed in a system of ideas, or a world view, which may be contained in lengthy scriptures . . . For the centre or core of a world view I shall use the word 'vision' . . . In general it will be found that the Islamic vision permeates and informs the whole life of society and individuals in the Islamic world. This does not mean that the vision or religious belief absolutely determines the whole of life, for there are various aspects which have a relative autonomy; but it exercises a certain control or pressure on the whole. Such a conception of the function of religion is closer to the Muslim conception of *din* than to the usual occidental conception," Watt, *What Is Islam?* 4. Watt, who was himself a clergyman of the Scottish Episcopalian Church, is here re-visioning Christianity in terms of what he understood to be an Islamic conception of religion.

either religion is compared to a religion such as Hinduism. Scholars are not even sure if “religion” (in the sense that Westerners understand the word) is the right term to apply to Hinduism, or whether there is even one single thing that can even properly be called “Hinduism.” These problems of definition do not occur with Islam.³⁰

I beg to differ: the problems of definition *do* occur with Islam—no doubt, in ways more subtle (and thus more easily glossed over) than is the case with Hinduism or Buddhism; but with analytical consequences that are no less profound for that. To conceptualize Islam as “religion” is—as the above passage betrays—to look at Islam and Christianity as, for all primary constitutive purposes, mutually intelligible or mutually translatable. The two are regarded as *primarily* the same and only *secondarily* different. But when we posit Islam and Christianity as naturally explicable in terms of each other, what we really are doing is giving analytical priority to the category of “religion” as constituted by the European historical experience; we are saying that because Christianity and Islam are both “religions” there is a categorical equivalence between them that makes it meaningful to speak of Islam in paradigmatic terms of Christianity. We are thereby omitting to pay sufficient attention to whether there are inherent structural or substantive or processual qualities with regard to Islam that render it crucially *different* from Christianity—different in a manner and degree that so severely diminishes the utility of the analytical work that the category of “religion” does as to effectively invalidate the category of “religion” as a meaningful unit of analysis for Islam.³¹

I should like to draw attention here to one such crucial omission. While it is a commonplace to acknowledge that, unlike the religion of Christianity, the

³⁰ Mark Sedgwick, *Islam and Muslims: A Guide to Diverse Experience in a Modern World*, Boston: Intercultural Press, 2006, 2.

³¹ “When Western scholars study Islam, for example, there is an implicit comparison with Christianity. In this comparison, both Christianity and Islam are subsumed under the third term, religion. The problem arises because the characteristics of the third term are derived from Christianity to begin with. The allegedly universal concept, ‘religion,’ is defined in particularistic, that is, Christian terms. The result is the construction of Islam in terms of Christian categories and concepts. This is what Matthes calls the ‘hidden’ Christianization of other religions,” Syed Farid Alatas, “Contemporary Muslim Revival: The Case of ‘Protestant Islam,’” *Muslim World* 97 (2007) 508–520, at 516. Also, “A specialized Islamicist . . . might spend a lifetime of fruitful research without having to (although he of course may) worry for a moment about what he means when he refers to his subject matter as ‘religious’. To the extent that many such specialists of specific traditions do not precisely study religions *as* religions . . . their research . . . at most . . . may be classed pragmatically as exemplifying the ‘study of [those human traditions which happen to be conventionally, intuitively, referred to as] religions’,” Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Defining Religion In Spite of History,” in Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk (editors), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999, 337–378, at 337.

religion of Islam has no Church institution, what is rarely done is to follow the ageless advice of Imru' al-Qays to *halt* upon the traces of this observation (rather than to sidestep it and move on), so as to discern the *implications* and *consequences* of this fundamental *difference* in social structure and discursive dynamic for the nature of the entity at stake. A Church is a social and material and political and cultural institution expressly invested *as an institution* with the function of and mechanisms for determining truth, with delineating the relational domains of truth, and with enunciating the communicative idiom for the expression of that truth in society. Now: is it not more likely that a truth-community which does not possess this designated truth-constituting institution will, *as regards its conceptualization of the processes by which truth is made, calibrated, legitimated, valorized, experienced, and socio-spatially distributed*, be crucially *different from rather than similar to* another truth-community which does possess such a definitive institution? At no point in the history of Muslims has an institution existed whose members could exercise, from their institutional locus, a claim to monopoly over the calibration and valorization of truth in society-at-large; nor, by the same token, did an institution exist that was available at the strategic historical moment to be cut down to size by society-at-large and duly sequestered within its walls as the limited (re)liability corporation of a truth-product designated only for certain times and spaces. Indeed, one of the great inconveniences experienced by the projects of secularization undertaken by modern Muslim states has been the *absence* of a readily-available institution within which to sequester "religion/Islam," with the result that such an institution has had to be invented along with the concomitant re-making of the "religion" to be housed therein. Thus, the self-consciously secular and Europeanizing modern Turkish Republic had, *in order make itself secular*, not merely to replace *shari'ah* law with European law, but to invent in 1924 a "Directorate of Religious Affairs" (*Diyanet İşleri Riyaseti*) in which to locate the republican administration of the new entity "religion"=Islam of which, unprecedently and crucially, *law* was no longer a conceptual or practical part.³² And it is precisely the "secular" legal system of the Turkish republic that has been instrumental in the judicial manufacture of the category of "private religion" in binary opposition to "public secular": "the laws of the new nation tell the masses what they are and are not allowed to do with their religious beliefs and practices."³³ Similarly, in the cases of the numerous societies of Muslims

³² On this institution, see İrfan Yücel, "Diyanet İşleri Başlangıç," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Islam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İSAM, 1988–2013, 9:455–460.

³³ "It is crucial to remember that secularism is first and foremost realized through law," Seval Yıldırım, "The Search for Shared Idioms: Contesting Views of Laiklik Before the Turkish Constitu-

under colonial rule, the conceptual, discursive, social, political, and institutional reconstitution of “Islam” into the terms of the modern European binary of religious/secular was effected by the forceful intervention in the societies of Muslim colonial subjects by European colonial regimes, not just in measures such as the confining of the jurisdiction of Islamic law to the domain of the “personal status law” of marriage, inheritance and so on (the personal being the legitimate modern domain for the religious), but also in actions with more insidious consequences, such as the severing of the historical relationships of various intellectual discourses through the radical reorganization and reconstitution of educational institutions and curricular content—that is to say, by a prescriptive reconstitution of the discourses and institutions of concept-formation, including the compartmentalizing concepts of “religious” and “secular.”

My point is that the production, constitution and operation of *truth* in the bulk of human and historical Islam has been conceptually, discursively, socially and spatially *non-compartmentalized*; rather, it has been conceptually, discursively, socially and spatially *diffuse* according to a dynamic whose operation is critically different from that of the Christian truth on the basis of whose historical experience is established the modern category of religion and the religious-secular binary. Joachim Matthes has put it well:

While Christian “religion” has, as European phenomenologists would phrase it, its *Sitz im Leben* (literally translated, *seat in life, location in life*) in the church and in the local Christian congregations in which it is organized, Islam’s *Sitz im Leben* is more pronounced in everyday life, in the social and cultural bonds which connect people, in their ways of communicating with one another.³⁴

Indeed, this intrinsically non-compartmentalized and socially-diffuse nature of truth in Islam means precisely that, when we apply the paradigm of “religion” to the object “Islam”—that is, when we make “religion” our lens rather than, say, *truth* or *meaning*—we are confronted with a difficulty in conceptualizing Islam that simply does not arise in conceptualizing Christianity/religion: namely, that of *where to locate* religion/Islam. We know where to locate religion/Christianity today: in the Church and in the private conscience of the modern individual: other “wheres” are domains of the secular. In seeking to pick out certain phenomena as religion and in seeking to render those

tutional Court,” in Gabriel Marranci (editor), *Muslim Societies and the Challenge of Secularization: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2010, 235–251, at 237.

³⁴ Matthes, “Religion in the Social Sciences,” 100.

phenomena mutually translatable, we end up imposing the language and criteria constitutive of a single phenomenon and historical experience—namely, Christianity and its quarantining by the category of “religion” in the post-Enlightenment West—on all other phenomena. Perhaps the biggest mistake we can make is to fall victim to what Arvind Pal Mandair has called “the ruse of religion’s pure translatability”³⁵ and say with the first edition of the *Cambridge History of Islam*:

What is Islam? In what sense is Islam an appropriate field for historical enquiry? Primarily, of course, Islam is, like Christianity, a religion . . . the faith of Islam has, again like Christianity, been a great synthesizing agent . . . Islam, then . . . is a complex cultural synthesis, centred in a distinctive religious faith, and necessarily set in the framework of a continuing political life.³⁶

Quite the opposite: *primarily*, Islam is *not* a religion *like* Christianity; whatever the surface similarities, it is in its fundamental structure for the conceptualization and production of truth and meaning so *unlike* Christianity as to render “religion” a distortative category of common analysis, precisely because “religion” diverts us from taking stock of the truth and consequences of those fundamental structural differences. The fact that there is no Church in Islam means that there is no institution invested with the epistemological authority to affix the imprimatur of religious truth upon a statement and send it forth as such into society. As Wadad al-Qadi has simply put it, “The entire community bore the burden of interpreting the revelatory-prophetic legacy.”³⁷ In the case of Islam, every truth-statement or act of meaning-making—whether a *fatwā* (legal opinion), *‘aqidah* (creedal statement), philosophical treatise, Sufi vision, miniature painting, *ghazal* (amatory poem) or dervish-whirl—is a *personal profession* issuing not from an institution of corporate

³⁵ Mandair also notes: “What is never questioned, because it is always assumed, is the concept of religion . . . indeed, the relation between religion and conceptuality . . . according to which the meaning and concept of religion is accepted universally and without resistance,” Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West*, 409, and 9. Also: “The schema provided an intuitive comprehension of the ‘meaning-value’ of cultures through a principle of ‘generalized translation’—a mechanism for bringing different cultures in to a taxonomic system of equivalence,” Arvind-Pal S. Mandair and Markus Dressler, “Modernity, Religion-Making, and the Post-Secular,” in Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (editors), *Secularism and Religion-Making*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 3–36, at 15.

³⁶ Holt, “Introduction,” xi-xii.

³⁷ Wadad al-Qadi, “The Conceptual Foundation of Cultural Diversity in Pre-Modern Islamic Civilization,” in Abdul Aziz Said and Meena Sharify-Funk (editors), *Cultural Diversity and Islam*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2003, 85–106, at 106.

communion but from an individual Muslim entering into a vast and polyphonic discursive terrain consisting of the clamour of Muslim readers, speakers, critics, interlocutors, and audiences. Certainly, some of these participants might, at a given historical moment, possess greater or lesser political or social power, but none has the universally recognized, designated, formalized, exclusive function of constituting and certifying the “religiousness” of a given statement. Even a *fatwa* issued by a state *mufti* (in those cases where such exist) has no greater *epistemological authority*—as distinct from *political authority*—than one issued by a non-state *mufti*: such extra authority as is possessed by the ruling of the state *mufti* is the political and executive authority of the state: Haim Gerber notes of the treatment of the *fatwas* of the Ottoman *Şeyh-ül-Islâm* by later jurists, “in no case is the authority of a *Şeyhüllâslâm* accepted because he is a *Şeyhüllâslâm*. Often his opinion is rejected, and this is never done with any exceptional treatment.”³⁸ Similarly, the genre of the creedal statement has no inherent *institutional and constitutive authority* in societies of Muslims. Unlike Christianity, where each Church (Catholic or Protestant) issues a creedal statement to which one must confess (oneself) in order to partake of the institution of communion with the Church, in the case of Islam there is no institutional mechanism (such as a Church council) that authorizes any such statement to be a *true* and *indefeasible* condition of corporate membership; rather, the authority of the statement is contingent on the individual act of assent and affiliation by the person receiving the statement to the person who has made the statement. That act of assent affiliates the individual with the larger community of discourse of which that statement is a part and an expression—and thus with the vocabulary, epistemology, ethic and aesthetic of that community of discourse.³⁹ Even the legal *madhab* is a discursive rather than an institutional entity: it has no physical or spatial corporate headquarters or salaried office-bearers—its statements are not formalized in a mosque council or a *madrasah* committee, and its applied authority is entirely contingent on the willingness of the state and community to go its way—that is, to proceed in the *madhab*.

³⁸ Haim Gerber, *Islamic Law and Culture, 1600–1840*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999, 62.

³⁹ A similar point was made by Norman Calder: “We cannot find a single Muslim (or Sunni) creed which is believed in by all Muslims. There are probably hundreds of Muslim creeds . . . written out by different scholars. The significant creeds are those that emerge within a discursive tradition through an informal, consensual acknowledgement of value that is quite different from the formal procedures of the Roman Catholic hierarchy,” Norman Calder, “The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy,” in Farhad Daftary (editor), *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, 66–86, 68. For a sense of how very different to Islam in significance and scale is the institutional identity and constitutive function of creedal statements in both Catholic and Protestant Christianity, see the massive study by Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

The compartmentalizing and fracturing effects that translating the word *din* as “religion” has on our capacity to recognize and conceptualize the diffuse spatiality of truth in Islam are readily illustrated in the difficulties that we encounter in conceptualizing in coherent terms of Islam the fundamental question of the relationship between *dunyā*, “the world,” and *din*. Louis Gardet tells us in his entry on “*Dīn*” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*:

Dīn is the corpus of obligatory prescriptions given by God, to which one must submit . . . Thus . . . from the standpoint of him who has to discharge the obligation . . . *dīn* must be translated “religion”—the most general and frequent sense. There is no doubt about this translation. But the concept indicated by *dīn* does not exactly coincide with the ordinary concept of “religion,” precisely because of the semantic connections of the words. *Religio* evokes primarily that which binds man to God; and *dīn* the obligations which God imposes on His “reasoning creatures” (*aṣḥāb al-‘ukūl* as Djurdjānī says). Now the first of these obligations is to submit to God and surrender oneself to him. Since the etymological sense of *islām* is “surrender of self (to God),” the famous Qur’anic verse then shows its full meaning: “This day I have perfected your religion (*dīn*) for you and completed my favour unto you, and have chosen for you as your religion *al-Islam*.”

. . . *Dīn*, distinct from *milla* and *madhhab* is opposed to *dunyā*. The nearest translations would be the *relations* of the spiritual and the temporal. *Dīn*: the domain of divine prescriptions concerning acts of worship and everything involved in spiritual life; *dunyā*: “domain of material life,” . . . *dīn* and *dunyā* are undoubtedly opposites . . . But the most traditional tendency [among Muslims] is to subordinate *dunyā* to *dīn*, to make “this base world” in some way included in the “domain of religion.”⁴⁰

It is difficult to characterize the above passage as other than somewhat confusing. If “the concept indicated by *din* does not exactly coincide with the ordinary concept of ‘religion,’ precisely because of the respective semantic connections of the words,” then how can we say of the rendering of *din* as “religion” that “there is no doubt about this translation”? Second, if *dīn* is categorically opposed to *dunyā* in the sense of the opposition of the spiritual to the material, then what does it mean for *dunyā* to be made “subordinate” to *dīn*? When the “material” *dunyā* is subordinated to the superordinate “spir-

⁴⁰ L. Gardet, “*Dīn*,” in B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht (editors), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition). Volume II*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965, 293–296, at 293 and 295.

itual” *dīn* does it still remain the “material” or it is now infused with the “spiritual”? And if the material is infused with the spiritual is it still opposed to the spiritual? Elsewhere Gardet provides something of an answer to this question:

Islam is, in its deepest sense, *dīn wa dawla*, “religion and city,” and too rigid a classification into separate sections would not be true to its historical reality. In the Muslim countries, neither science nor secular literature nor art were separated from religion in the way that certain branches of modern humanism have been in Europe. They were affected by Muslim values . . . it could be said that they belonged to Islam considered as community, as a temporal city, without being attached, nevertheless, to the sphere of religion.⁴¹

So the “historical reality” is that Islam “is, in its deepest sense, *dīn wa dawla*” (the word *dawlah* is here effectively being substituted for *dunyā* in the previous passage) such that “too rigid a classification into separate sections would not be true,” and where the self-expression of Muslims (science, secular literature, art) is somehow “affected by Muslim values” such that these “belong to Islam,” but only “to Islam considered as community” (*millah, ummah*), “without being *attached*, nevertheless, to the *sphere* of religion.” So, to conceptualize Islam, we must maintain the integrity of the “sphere of religion” while nonetheless allowing the values of that sphere to “affect” science, secular literature and art as practiced by the people who practice that religion, to which end we must maintain the non-attachment to religion of these self-articulations by Muslims affected by Muslim values. If this is as close as one can get to an analytical impersonation of having one’s cake and eating it, it is because Gardet is struggling valiantly to conceive of the *interactive dīn* and *dunyā* dynamic in conceptual terms of the “religion” versus “temporal” relationship and is insisting on keeping *dīn* and *dunyā* analytically apart, even as *dīn* and *dunyā* insist on coming dynamically together to work as *Islam*. Simply, the prioritizing of the *separateness* of *dīn* and *dunyā*—which arises directly from the use of the term “religion” and its binary relations—rather than focusing on how *dīn* and *dunyā* come together as Islam does us no good service as regards attaining analytical or conceptual clarity about Islam.

Also, if we take Islam to be “religion,” and “religion” to be *dīn*, and then take *dīn* to be “the obligatory prescriptions given by God, to which to one must submit,” then while we have acquired a conceptualization of comforting

⁴¹ Gardet, “Religion and Culture,” 601.

uncomplicatedness, we have in no way helped ourselves to understand the various questions raised in Chapter 1 where Muslims acting as *Muslims*—that is, acting in self-conscious terms of Islam—are engaged in an expansive range of *enactments and statements* of their *being Muslim* (that is, of their Islam) that cannot be domesticated or made meaningful by the compass of “obligatory prescriptions.”⁴² One is reminded here of E. M. Forster’s memorable description of the British national anthem as “a series of curt demands on Jehovah”:⁴³ to conceptualize Islam in dictionary terms of *dīn* is effectively to conceptualize Islam as no more than a series of curt demands by Jehovah [sic] on us—which is simply not adequate to the task of conceptualizing the expansive and creative range of human and historical articulation of Islam.

William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon point out that it is with “the category ‘religion’ and its relations to a series of other categories and discursive domains” that “some humans . . . divide up, and arrange, and thereby come to know their worlds,” that “we moderns think and act our particular world into meaningfulness.”⁴⁴ The question is whether “the category ‘religion’ and its relations to a series of other categories and discursive domains” helps us to understand how (pre-modern and/or modern) Muslims divide up, arrange and come to know their worlds, how Muslims think and act their worlds into meaningfulness—or whether “religion” is an “obstacle to cross-cultural (including cross-temporal) understanding.”⁴⁵ My point is that when we conceptualize Islam as “religion” we put on a pair of lenses that lead us to *organize* and *valorize* the object we behold in primary terms of categorical *separateness* through the questions: Is *x* religion and therefore Islam, or is *x* secular and therefore not-Islam? Is *x* sacred and therefore Islam, or is *x* profane and therefore not-Islam? Is *x* scriptural and therefore Islam, or is *x* non-scriptural and therefore not-Islam? Is *x* prescriptive/proscriptive discourse, such as creed and law, and therefore Islam, or is it non-prescriptive/proscriptive discourse such as love-poetry or wine-poetry and thus not-Islam? Is *x* devotional and therefore Islam, or is *x* not devotional and therefore not-Islam? This set of questions—which are the set of questions necessarily consequent upon the binary concept of “religion/secular”—and the taxonomical commitments em-

⁴² To adapt to our purpose a phrase by Amyn Sajoo: conceptualizing Islam as “‘religion’= *dīn*=obligations to God” “yields . . . an ethos that is readily identified as a body of sacred rules . . . in which human agency and reason are reduced to acts of compliance,” Amyn Sajoo, “Public Ethics,” in Andrew Rippin (editor), *The Islamic World*, London: Routledge, 2008, 591–609, at 591.

⁴³ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, London: E. Arnold, 1924, 26; viz., “God save our gracious Queen! Long live our noble Queen! God save the Queen!” etc.

⁴⁴ William E. Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of “Religion,”* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 11 and 16.

⁴⁵ Arnal and McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane*, 30.

bedded therein simply do not help us to conceptualize Islam. Is the poetry of Hāfiẓ religious or secular, is it sacred or profane, is it scriptural or non-scriptural—or is it, in each question, both; or is it, in each question, neither? Is the wine-cup of Jahāngīr a religious or a secular object—or is it both, or is it neither? Given that philosophy sets up and operates by the truth-making authority of Reason (the definitive truth-source of the modern category “secular”) over and above Revelation (the definitive truth-source of the modern “religion”), then are we not constrained to understand philosophy to be a *secular* discourse and thus not (properly) religion/Islam—*pace* Ibn Sīnā (to whom the question would make no sense anyway in his liberated cognitive condition nearly a millennium prior to the invention of the religious-secular binary)? When applied to the issues raised in Chapter 1, these questions and their conceptual premise of religious/secular lead nowhere—or, rather, lead us to a conceptual and analytical impasse. Islam is, without doubt, “a complex cultural synthesis”—but if we set upon our noses the conceptual premise that Islam is a complex cultural synthesis “like Christianity,” then we are peering forth dimly through the wrong glass.



Islam is the name of a human and historical phenomenon whereby and wherein *truth and meaning are constituted and distributed* in particular ways that are not adequately captured or apprehended by the concept of *religion*, constituted and embedded, as that term is today, in the historical experience of the relationship of Europeans to Christianity. When we conceive of Islam as *religion* we are ineluctably entering into a conceptual order(-ing)—into a taxonomy of ideas, actions, and objects—that assumes the universality of the Modern Western religious-secular binary. Simply, the adoption of the pseudo-universal category “religion” implicates us in the pseudo-universal category “secular.” We are, in other words, simultaneously *enabled* and *constrained* to view and valorize and make sense of objects by focusing on what our lens and language deems to be their salient constitutive and locative features—even when those features are not the salient ones and are mislocated by us. The *force* of this cognitive habit is hard to kick. Habituated as we are to the received naturalized divisions of religious and secular, we resort to them as self-evident explanatory concepts, reflexively separating out what we consider to be religious and secular discourse or actions—even when there is no historical indication that Muslims themselves did as we are doing.

For example, when Lenn Goodman undertakes in his rehabilitative study of what he calls “Islamic Humanism” (a historical phenomenon to which he

is deeply sympathetic, but which he regards as pretty much extinct) to present “another Islam, tolerant, pluralistic, cosmopolitan without triumphalism and spiritual without repression . . . an Islam that many Muslims are looking for and that some have never heard of . . . to put Muslims as well as non-Muslims in touch with a few of the materials and ideas that might be relevant in that work of rediscovery and reinvention,”⁴⁶ he sets out the conceptual stall of “Islamic Humanism” under the rubric of “The Sacred and the Secular” (the title of the first chapter of his book). Goodman describes his project as an:

appraisal of some widely varied articulations of values, sacred and secular, that intertwine, support, and nourish one another, borrow and steal from one another, and occasionally seek to smother one another, never with perfect success. Neither secularity nor theocracy is seen here as the “answer” for Muslims . . . Indeed, one of the findings of our exploration is that these two seeming opposites, like so many polarized extremes, meet and often couple behind the scenes. Secularism can become a religion of sorts . . . and theocracy can be brutally secular in its goals and methods . . . Equilibrium is what must be sought.⁴⁷

Monotheism finds significance in all things . . . as an expression of divine creativity—God’s pleasure, or perhaps displeasure. Paganism . . . keeps its values free and independent of one another, in some measure. But autonomous values may conflict, and likely will. In a mythic scheme, definition is won by contrast and contrast is dramatically projected as conflict . . . If autonomous values are to be preserved . . . contrast becomes a value in itself, and violence may follow. Intensity becomes the badge of authenticity. Tragedy is then the highest art; and paradox, the most profound philosophy . . . secularity has this in common with paganism: that it prizes values insofar as they are not subsumed in some Ultimate. So the multiple and disparate interests of secularity, even if well-mannered, may seem misdirected to the monotheist. Disparate values are cherished, for their moment—elegance, pleasure, fun, fashion, discipline, honor, sport, seduction, vengeance, virtuosity, bravado, sprezzatura, fame, and other aesthetic models . . . Yet, through a paradox of monotheism or a perversity in secularity, monotheistic religions seem to feed upon and egg on their rivals, autonomous secular pursuits. Spurning or neglecting secular concerns only gives them an identity and an

⁴⁶ Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 23; for Goodman’s view on the lack of Islamic humanism today, see 119–121.

⁴⁷ Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 28.

animus. But trying to set them into an overarching value hierarchy can assign them canonical legitimacy. Equilibrium is elusive.⁴⁸

... a central ambiguity for the cultured Muslim. That man or woman's culture, be it Arab, African, Chinese, or Malay, is not co-extensive with Islam. But neither is it separable from the claims of Islam ... Faithful Muslims do seek to integrate God's service with a life that is not barren by purely human standards. But individuals differ in what they find fruitful or barren. Secularity is the island or continent where such spirits live, at least part of the time. And that land mass, large or small, is never fully submerged. For Islam, like every religion, harbors its own secular moments and spaces. It fosters secularities that are at once inimical to its claims and yet symbiotic with it ... Islam becomes a way of life coloring every culture reached by the Qur'an and the Arabic language. In the cosmopolitan civilization that results, communities and individuals find their own tents and awnings, accommodating the sacred and the secular in various modes of coexistence, some intricately devised, some casual or haphazard, some coherent, others restive or unstable, some synthetic or creative, others vapid, stiff, or angry. Many of these shelters are such that those who have lived in their shade could find that they were experiencing something of the best of this world without being deprived of some taste of the next.⁴⁹

Goodman here proceeds on the basis of the assumed antinomies of the universal categories of religion/sacred and secular. First, it is assumed that all monotheistic religions are essentially alike in their valorization of existence—apparently for no reason other than that they are monotheistic and that they are religion. The notion that there might be something in the human and historical trajectory of Islam that fundamentally distinguishes its terms of engagement with and valorization of “things” from that by which other monotheisms (allegedly) produce and constitute the categories of sacred and secular is not considered. Rather, the categorical idea of the *separateness* of the spaces of the religious/sacred and the secular is assumed as a *universal* governing concept *a priori*: the secular value being that which is not “subsumed in some Ultimate,” and the sacred/religious value, by implication, that which is so *subsumed*.

The mark of secular values is, for Goodman, their autonomy from each other, which leads to conflict and paradox. The mark of religious values would

⁴⁸ Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 32–33.

⁴⁹ Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 81.

seem, by implication, to be the opposite: dependence (upon the Ultimate) and agreement. The interests of the secular are aesthetic: elegance, pleasure, fun, fashion, discipline, honor, sport, seduction, vengeance, virtuosity, bravado, sprezzatura, fame; these are described as the *rivals* to the religious—the implication being that when a Muslim pursues these values, he is leaving the domain of Islam(-proper) and is entering a universal “secular” terrain. Islamic humanism would appear then to be an attempt by the religious to domesticate the secular in an “overarching value hierarchy.” The difficulty for Muslims lies in the irreconciliability of antinomies, in the limits of the capacity of religion to integrate the secular: “equilibrium is elusive”; there is “a tension between monotheism and secularity.”⁵⁰ It is this elusiveness that, it would appear, leads to the “central ambiguity of the cultured Muslim” whose culture has a “coloring” of Islam (note the similar image to that of the sliding-scale or litmus test seen in the discussion of Hodgson, above) and yet is not co-extensive with Islam, who seeks “to integrate God’s service with a life that is not barren by purely human standards.” The haven for a “life not barren by human standards” is the secular island, never fully submerged by the (implicitly in-/non-human) ocean of religion/Islam (or is otherwise those awnings in the vast tent of Islam under which the secular finds shade). The result of this is that Goodman’s notion of Islamic humanism ends up as the *poorly-integrated* attempt on the part of a few Muslims to accommodate the secular within or to the religious—an attempt that, ultimately, leaves these Muslims, at worst, marooned and, at best, vacationing on secular islands. If Islamic humanism is extinct, as Goodman believes, it is presumably because the two antinomies, religious and secular, while they might mate in secret, cannot be made to *live together* in social equilibrium—perhaps, they must live apart in the equilibrium of the truth-apartheid that modernity has effected.

The problem is that Goodman’s pre-conceptual adoption of the religious-secular binary ends up pretty much debilitating his rehabilitative project from the get-go. Once Islam as religion/monotheism is understood by Goodman’s definition to be separate from the temporal and *subsumed* in the Ultimate—rather than, say, in some sort of temporal dialogue with the Ultimate—it is necessarily identified with absolute and non-contradictory values. In Goodman’s schema, *contradiction* is a positive constitutive feature only of the secular where the autonomous non-ultimate nature of values means that “contrast becomes a value in itself.” Thus, while Goodman, in what is a deeply learned and vivid account of important aspects of Muslim discourses up to about the end of the twelfth century, *describes* a great deal of contradiction as

⁵⁰ Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 49.

a matter of historical fact, it is simply not clear what that contradiction has, in positive terms, to do with the constitution of *Islam* since we are told that contrast/contradiction is a *secular* value.

My point, however, is precisely that to conceptualize Islam as a human and historical phenomenon we must—by reason of the various examples laid out in Chapter 1—find a means to conceptualize contrast/contradiction as *constitutive* of Islam, and not merely as symptomatic of Islam’s problematic encounter with the secular. It has clearly emerged from Chapter 1, that, ironically and revealingly, Goodman’s characterization of the *secular*—“contrast becomes a value in itself . . . and paradox, the most profound philosophy”—fits most aptly the self-expressive discourses of the literary canon of the societies of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (as will be discussed further in Chapter 6). It makes no sense to classify as *secular*—that is, separate from Islam construed as religion—what is an historically prevalent idiom of Muslims’ self-expression and communication in which ambiguity, ambivalence, contradiction and paradox are legitimate and enfranchising predicaments experienced and lived as a crucial part of *being Muslim* (lived as Islam) and are not illegitimate and alienating predicaments experienced in the exile of a desert-island retreat. Only a conceptualization that does not merely describe, but *conceptually accounts for* the lived presence of ambiguity, ambivalence, contradiction and paradox at the heart of human and historical Islam can make sense of the questions raised in Chapter 1 (one that also accounts for tragedy, which is a defining value-motif of Shī‘ī Islam). And no such conceptualization is possible under the conceptual government of the religious/secular binary wherein “Islamic humanism” becomes no more than the attempt by the practitioners of a particular religion to find a space for non-religion: “*adab* . . . the tradition of literary humanism . . . was the core of a higher secular culture.”⁵¹ Indeed, what *redeems* and rehabilitates Islam in Goodman’s “Islamic humanism” is not Islam *per se*, but the worthy attempt by some Muslims to accommodate the secular; in this account, it is the presence of the secular that renders “Islamic humanism” *humanism*—it is not clear here what *constructive value* it is that the qualifier “Islamic” brings to the equation at all.

Goodman’s assumption of the sacred/secular divide is predicated, rather like Hodgson’s assumption of the religion/culture divide, on the notion that religion and secular are effectively self-defining or self-identifying categories. Thus, he states that elegance, pleasure, fun, fashion, discipline, honor, sport, seduction, vengeance, virtuosity, bravado, sprezzatura, fame and “other aes-

⁵¹ Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 108.

thetic models” are authentically and in their pristine state *secular* conditions and values. The effect of this is, again, to induce us, when we look at a society of Muslims to view these aesthetic models in the first instance—one might say, in their first moment and meaning—as secular. But is this, in fact, the best lens by which to bring into focus the constitution and meaningfulness of these values as they are mobilized in a society of Muslims? I suggest that the aesthetic models which Goodman’s vocabulary constitutes, categorizes and valorizes as self-evidently and authentically “secular,” rather than as self-evidently and authentically “religious,” are, in fact, constituted by Muslims themselves in a quite different configuration of meaning and value which the religious/secular binary simply does not help us to discern. As a concrete example of such an act and condition where the categories of secular and religious simply do not help to make sense of the *operation of meaning* that the vocabulary and terms of the society of Muslims is carrying out, let me present the sartorial, social, ethical, and cosmological condition of *kajkulāhī* or “crooked-hatted-ness.”

In the societies of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex and epoch, to wear one’s hat *straight* was a statement that the person under the hat was similarly in line with the straight (and narrow) of prescriptive discourse; to wear one’s hat *crooked* was a statement, made deliberately by the individual hat-wearer, and read consciously as such by society, that the person was not concerned to be seen to be conforming to the prescribed appearance of moral uprightness and public propriety—and was thus to invite the suspicion that the person beneath the hat was similarly awry (certainly no scholar of the law would be seen wearing his headgear at a rakish angle). Specifically, the “fashion” of wearing the hat crooked was associated with the aficionados of the *madhab-i ‘ishq*: the crooked hat betokened an individual whose self-presentation in society took the forms of “elegance” and “sprezzatura,” it betokened an openness for the “pleasures” of the “sport” of “seduction” by beauty (itself the earthly manifestation of the divine) that is part-and-parcel of the experience of love. From the standpoint of legalistic moralism, *kajkulāhī* was libertinism—it connoted people who wore flower-embroidered coats, and drank wine and indulged in dangerous liaisons of the heart: as such, wearing the hat crooked was very much an act of social “bravado” that suggested someone who courted notoriety (“fame”) and the impugning of his “honour” by indulging in “fun” beyond the “discipline” of prescribed forms. From the point of view of the *kajkulāhī* himself, however, crooked-hatted-ness also connoted an *inclination* towards taking one’s own experiential risks *vis-à-vis* living with Divine Truth (loving being a risky business); it was a statement that one had a different mode of making meaning and value to that which the legalists

prescribed as Islam—a mode of meaning-making that is located precisely in *aesthetic models*.

Perhaps the most famous account of crooked-hatted-ness as Islamic value and meaning in society is the much-retold story of the river-side conversation between two of the most celebrated and venerated personalities of Islam in South Asia: the patron-saint of Delhi, Sayyid Nizām-ud-Dīn Awliyā (whose tomb-shrine is to this day one of the two most important sites of Muslims' pilgrimage in India), and his devotee, the poet and musician, Amīr Khusraw, who is regarded as the founder of the musical systems practiced by North Indian Muslims (this aside from him being one of those Persian poets whose *Dīvān* appears in both the Mughal and Ottoman canons)⁵² and who wrote prodigiously of wine and of the bewitching charms of Hindu and Turk lads and lasses.

One day, Shaykh Nizām-ud-Dīn Awliyā had placed his cap to the side of his head, and was sitting on a terrace by the River Jumna observing the spectacle of the Hindu rituals and devotions [‘ibādāt]. Just then, Amīr Khusraw appeared. The Shaykh turned to him and said: “Do you observe this congregation [*jamā‘at*]?” and this hemistich came to his tongue:

For every people: its path, its *dīn*, and its prayer-direction [*qiblah*]!

The Mīr, without a moment's contemplation, and with all due decorum, addressed himself to the Shaykh with the completing hemistich:

I have set my *qiblah* straight in the way of the crooked-hatted!⁵³

Here, the pious Sufi saint—whose *nom déposé* means, literally, “the Order of *Dīn*”⁵⁴—is found by his friend, the poet and musician, indulging in a pastime one might not expect of him: he is watching (male and female) Hindu devo-

⁵² The library of the Ottoman Sultan Bāyezid II (1447–1512) owned not less than twenty-eight copies of works by Amīr Khusraw; see the catalogue compiled in 1502 by Khidr b. ‘Umar al-‘Ātūfi, *Daftar al-kutub* [=Catalogue of the Library of Sultan Bāyezid II], MS Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Künyvtara Keleti Gyűjtemény, Török F. 59, 238–239.

⁵³ The renowned couplet is: *har qawm rā-st rāhī dīnī o qiblah-gāhī / mā qiblah rāst kardīm bar samt-i kaj-kulāhī*, cited in Nūr-ud-Dīn Muhammad Jahāngīr, *Tūzuk-i Jahāngīr* (edited by Muhammad Hāshim), Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1980, 97. Compare the translation of Alexander Rogers and Henry Beveridge, *The Tūzuk-i Jahāngīr, or Memoirs of Jahāngīr, from the First to the Twelfth Year of His Reign*, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909, 109; and of Wheeler M. Thackston, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, (translated, edited, and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston), New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 109. There is in the first hemistich a clear echo of Qur’ān 5:51 al-Mā’idah: “For each among you have we made a prescribed law and a way. Had God so willed he would have made you a single people . . . [lī-kullin ja’alnā min-kum shir’atan wa minhājan wa law shā’a Allāhu la-ja’ala-kum ummatan wāhidatan].”

⁵⁴ Nizām-ud-Dīn was his *laqab* (honorific); the name given him by his parents was Mu-

tees bathing in the river in a vista that was both a standard motif of life in the Indian subcontinent, as well as a standard erotic motif of the literature of the Muslims of the subcontinent. As if suitably to accouter himself for this *risqué* bit of anthropological voyeurism, “the Order of *Dīn*” has his hat set crooked. Having thus oriented himself to the contemplation of the vista of the Hindu bathers—a spectacle from which a strict legalist would surely have averted his eyes for fear of sin⁵⁵—Niẓām-ud-Dīn is led to voice the appreciation that every people have their own path, their own *dīn*, and their own *qiblah* (prayer-direction). Amīr Khusraw’s response to Niẓām-ud-Dīn’s opening poetical gambit, “I have set my *qiblah* straight in the way of the crooked-hatted,” is a gem of paradox and of play; but the salient point is that he is constituting crooked-hatted-ness as *dīn* and *qiblah*—that is, in terms of the basic vocabulary of Islam which indicates the orientation of a people towards divine truth, and that he is doing so *as a Muslim*—crooked-hatted-ness is Amīr Khusraw’s *dīn* and *qiblah*; it is a statement of Khusraw’s being Muslim. Amīr Khusraw is *not* making a “secular” or a “profane” statement, nor is he suggesting that the prayer-direction of his *qiblah* takes him—unlike the Hindu bathers—outside Islam; rather, by constituting crooked-hattedness in terms of Islam, Amīr Khusraw is constituting Islam in terms of crooked-hattedness.⁵⁶

hammad; see Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nizam-u'd-Din Auliya*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007 (new edition), 198–201 (Appendix 1).

⁵⁵ A seventeenth-century Central Asian Muslim traveler in India, Maḥmūd b. Amir Vali Balkhi, recounts how “the Hindus come down to the river, men and women, mixing together without semblance of cloth nor shame . . . while thousands of voyeurs, chattering, pleasure-seekers and vagabonds stand on the bank and observe the spectacle to their heart’s content . . . And gradually, in the midst of such provocation and distraction, the reins of Islam slip from their hands, and they are tied up in Hindu strings. It is not surprising that, from the marvels of these forms and the charms of these bodies and the admirable beauty of these delicate countenances, the feet of the Muslims slip in that place, and the fragile glass of their honour is shattered on the stones.” Maḥmūd gives in considerable detail an account of a local beauty in Patna (by the name of Dēsū) whose bathing in the Ganges attracted such large crowds (he puts the number at thirty-thousand!) that he himself (though presumably not a voyeur, chatterer, pleasure-seeker or vagabond) was able only to observe her from the vantage of a rooftop; see Maḥmūd b. Amir Wali Balkhi, *The Bahr ul-Asrār: Travelogue of South Asia* (introduced, edited, and annotated by Riazul Islam), Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, University of Karachi, 1980, 15, and 24–25. Attention is drawn to these passages in Richard Foltz, “Two Seventeenth-Century Central Asian Travellers to Mughal India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (3rd series) 6 (1996) 367–377, at 370 and 374 (compare Foltz’s translation; in my translation, I have attempted to reproduce some of the rhetoric of the original).

⁵⁶ *Kajkulāhī* may, perhaps, usefully be seen as an expanded instance of the operation of what Gregory Starrett, mobilizing Bourdieu’s passive notion of “bodily *hexis*”—that is, “political mythology . . . *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*” (Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 93–94)—has called “the *hexis* of interpretation,” by which he means an *active* process of embodied interpretation on the part of a Muslim agent. “For

That this co-authored couplet was understood by other Muslims to be saying something meaningful about Islam is evident in the fact that it became a famous item in the repertoire of the Sufi singers of *qawwālī*, or “intense utterance”—which is the name given in the Indian subcontinent to the ecstatic singing of Sufi poetry that aims to bring its audience into an auditory experience of the Real-Truth of the divine.⁵⁷ The version of the narrative quoted above is taken from the memoirs of the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr who recounts that the couplet was the refrain of a *qawwālī* being sung at his court. When Jahāngīr—who, it will be recalled, designated himself on his wine-cup as “The Knower of the Signs, Real-True [*haqīqī*] and Metaphorical!”—asked for an explanation of the “Real-Truth [*haqīqat*] of this couplet,” no sooner did the courtier who undertook to explain it to him utter the words “in the direction of the crooked-hatted” than he dropped dead on the spot. One wonders if he was not overcome by the Real-Truth of *kajkulāhī*!⁵⁸

The continuing meaningfulness of the crooked hat⁵⁹ for Muslims in modern South Asia is neatly summed up in the manifesto that the most widely-read Urdu poet of the post-Partition era, the Marxist recipient of the Lenin Prize for literature, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, proclaimed in couplets first published in 1952:

By our life’s-breath in the alleyway of mad-passion remain abashed
 The shaykh’s long cloak, the grandee’s robe, the emperor’s crown!
 It is in us that the *sunnah* of Mansūr and Qays live on!
 Thanks to us is yet the wearing of flowered-shirts and crooked-hats!⁶⁰

Muslims, who usually have some access to literate institutions, ritual hexis is always explicit to some degree . . . More significant than the implicit meanings of bodily hexis, then, are its public mediation and uses . . . We should pay particular attention to the relationship between bodily hexis and discourse . . . If body hexis is a useful concept with respect to Islamic ritual, it is . . . a matter of choosing bodily expressions of social boundaries,” Gregory Starrett, “The Hexis of Interpretation: Islam and the Body in the Egyptian Popular School,” *American Ethnologist* 22 (1995) 953–969, at 953 and 964–965. As explained above, however, *kajkulāhī* expresses much more than just social boundaries: it expresses Islam itself.

⁵⁷ On *qawwālī* see Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁵⁸ Jahāngīr, *Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, 97. This incident is a particularly dramatic enactment of W. V. Quine’s pronouncement: “Of all the ways of paradoxes, perhaps the quaintest is their capacity on occasions to turn out to be so much less frivolous than they look,” W. V. Quine, *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*, New York: Random House, 1966, 20.

⁵⁹ For a treatment of the pervasive consciousness of the meaningfulness of clothing forms in a historical society of Muslims, see Soheila Amirsoleimani, “Clothing in the Early Ghaznavid Courts: Hierarchy and Mystification,” *Studia Iranica* 32 (2003) 213–242.

⁶⁰ *hamārē dam sē hay kū’ē junūn mēn ab bhī khajil / ‘abā’-ē shaykh o qabā-ē amīr o tāj-e shahī // hamīn sē sunnat-i Mansūr o Qays zindah hay / hamīn sē bāqī hay gul-dāmanī o kajkulāhī*, Fayż

Faiz unfurls here, in the alleyway of love's-passion (which, in the conceit of the Balkans-to-Bengal Urdu/Persian/Turkish *ghazal*, is the alleyway where the B/beloved resides), the sartorial banner of his *madhhab* athwart those of the jurists and of the men-of-state. He (and his readers) follow the path—the word that Faiz uses is *sunnat*, that is, “custom” or “norm,” which is, of course, the Arabic term used for the *sunnah nabawiyyah* (Prophetic *sunnah*), being the binding norms established by the practice of the Prophet Muḥammad, which are generally regarded as having been specified in the texts of Hadith, and as constituting the second source-pillar of *shari‘ah*-law—of Manṣūr al-Hallāj (“I am the Truth!”), and of the archetypal lover of the Islamic world, Qays, the madman (*Majnūn*) of Laylā (on whom much more, below, in Chapter 5). To set one’s hat at a tilt (and to wear a flower-embroidered shirt) is thus nothing less than to make a hermeneutical statement about one’s conceptualization of Islam and what it means to be Muslim: it is a statement of an alternate normative notion of Islam expressed in an alternate normative way of going about life (*madhhab, sunnah*)—it is also very much a sartorial gesture by which the individual Muslim social actor spoke to and represented all of the aesthetic models and conditions of elegance, pleasure, fun, fashion, discipline, honor, sport, seduction, virtuosity, bravado, sprezzatura, and fame (the reader will find *all* these present in the foregoing two couplets). Thus did one of the pioneering exemplars of the *madhhab-i ‘ishq*, the aforementioned Sufi, Rūzbihān Baqlī, report a vision in which “I saw God in the form of a Turk with a silk hat which he had tilted to one side.”⁶¹ Crooked-hatted-ness is simultaneously couture and cosmology.

I have not thus far used the term “profane” in developing the critique of Goodman solely because Goodman himself chose to omit the term and to speak of the binary as *sacred* versus *secular* rather than *sacred* versus *profane*—but for all meaningful and practical purposes the words “secular” and “profane” are used interchangeably in the scholarly and popular discourse when invoking the religion/sacred versus secular/profane binary. Indeed, the binary distinction of sacred and profane has been absolutely central to the modern constitution of the category of religion. It is, of course, in terms of the antinomy “sacred” and “profane” that religion was famously defined by Émile

Aḥmad Fayż, *Dast-i Ṣabā*, 38, in Fayż, *Nuskhah-hā'e Vafā*, at 138 (compare the translation of Kiernan, *Poems by Faiz*, 159).

⁶¹ “I gripped the hem of His robe and said: ‘By the oneness of Your being! In whatever form You come forth and in whatever form You display Yourself to the loving eye (*jilwagar āyī*), I will still recognize you behind it (*az tu mahjūb na-khwāham shud*),” cited by Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 462, from a manuscript of a still unpublished work that I have not seen: Dōst-i Muḥammad b. Nawruz al-Akhsītākī, *Silsilat al-siddiqīn wa anīs al-‘āshiqīn*.

Durkheim in 1912 ("A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden").⁶² *Encyclopaedia Britannica* lists the following "common characteristics recognized in the sacred . . . by participant individuals and groups: it is separated from the common (profane) world; it expresses the ultimate total value and meaning of life; and it is the eternal reality, which is recognized to have been before it was known and to be known in a way different from that through which common things are known."⁶³ Following Durkheim, the sacred *versus* profane distinction was subsequently elaborated by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* (1917 and 1923),⁶⁴ and by Roger Caillois whose book *Man and the Sacred* (1939 and 1959) begins with the statement, "Basically, with regard to the sacred in general, the only thing that can be validly asserted is contained in the very definition of the term—that it is opposed to the profane . . . These two worlds, the sacred and the profane, are rigorously defined only in relation to each other. They are mutually exclusive and contradictory. It is useless to try eliminating this contradiction. This opposition appears to be a genuinely intuitive concept . . . Watertight compartments separate the sacred from the profane. Any contact between them is fatal. . . ."⁶⁵ In the post-World War II academic field of "Study of Religion," the widely-circulated book of Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, speaks of "the abyss that divides the two modalities of experience—sacred and profane," and states baldly that "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane."⁶⁶ Now, as we have seen, it is difficult to categorize *kajkulāhī* in terms of this "abyss that divides the two

⁶² The italics are in the original; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (translated and with an Introduction by Karen E. Fields), New York: Free Press, 1995, 44 (originally published as Émile Durkheim, *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris: F. Alcan, 1912; first translated into English as Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1915). The text continues: "—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."

⁶³ Frederick Streng, "Sacred (Religion)," www.britannica.com/topic/sacred (viewed on 1 October, 2014).

⁶⁴ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Natural* (translated by John. W. Harvey), London: Oxford University Press, 1923, (originally published as Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1917).

⁶⁵ Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, Glencoe: Free Press of Glencoe, 1959, 15, 19–20, 22 (originally published as Roger Caillois, *L'homme et le sacré*, Paris: Leroux, 1939).

⁶⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959, at 10 and 14. Eliade was also the editor-in-chief of the sixteen-volume foundational reference work of the academic field of Study of Religion: *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (edited by Mircea Eliade), New York, Macmillan, 1987.

modalities of experience": *kajkulāhī* appears as both the sacred/religious (*dīn*, *qiblah*, *madhhab*, and *sunnah*), and the profane/secular: elegance, pleasure, fun, fashion, discipline, honour, sport, seduction, virtuosity, bravado, sprezzatura, fame. It would appear, rather, that we are here closer to the condition that Edward Evans-Pritchard proposed against Durkheim's fundamental sacred-profane distinction, "What he calls 'sacred' and 'profane' are . . . so closely intermingled as to be inseparable"⁶⁷—except that Evans-Pritchard was talking about "primitive religion" while we are talking about here is far from "primitive."

Indeed, the defining sacred *versus* profane distinction is somewhat confounded in the taxonomies of the discourses of Muslims, both by the relative weakness of the concepts of "sacred" in the major languages of Muslims, and especially by the absence of an indigenous term that designates "profane." Samer Akkach points out how "translators of Eliade's works into Arabic face the difficulty of finding . . . that crucial definer, the elusive *profane* . . . the 'profane' has been rendered in various translations as *al-‘ādī* ('the ordinary')"—which purposes at *Britannica's* "common things" known in unextraordinary ways—"and *al-mudannas* ('the impure, 'the desecrated'), yet neither forms a polarity with the sacred that is traceable in premodern Arabic literature."⁶⁸ The Arabic trilateral root *q-d-s*, which is most regularly translated as "sacred" or "holy," is glossed in the pre-modern Arabic lexicons by the root *n-z-h*, connoting "purity," or the root *b-r-k*, conveying "blessing." The Qur'anic Divine Name *al-Quddūs* is glossed as "The Pure [*al-tāhir*]," "the Unblemished by Defects [*al-munazzah ‘an al-‘uyūb*]" or "The One upon Whom Blessing is made [*al-mubārak*]".⁶⁹ Not only is the root *q-d-s* not automatically associated with any root understood to be its polar opposite in meaning, but the words deriving from it, such as *quds*, *qudsī*, and *qadāsah*, are remarkably little used in the historical discourses of Muslims.⁷⁰ The Arabic root *h-r-m*, which connotes inviolability or taboo, whence the the precincts of the Ka'bah are known as the *haram*, being an inviolable physical space that is set apart

⁶⁷ Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965, 65.

⁶⁸ Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 164.

⁶⁹ As in the massive dictionary of the much-travelled eighteenth-century lexicographer mentioned above, Sayyid Muḥammad Murtadā al-Zabidi, *Tāj al-‘arūs min jawāhir al-qāmus* (edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī), Kuwait: Wizārat al-Irshād wa al-Anbā’, 1965–2001, 16:357. The *Tāj al-‘arūs* draws extensively on earlier dictionaries going back a millennium.

⁷⁰ The three most prominent instances all appear in this book: (*al-rūh al-qudus* or the Pure/Protected Spirit, *hadīth qudsī* or extra-Qur'anic divine speech, and *Bayt al-Maqdis* or "the House of the Sanctuary," which is Jerusalem).

and in which certain acts are taboo (the pilgrim to the Ka'bah observes a state of *ihrām*—a state of purity that will be polluted and nullified by the commission of certain acts) is, similarly, not automatically found to be accompanied by a binary opposite. There is no word that conveys a non-*haram* space: no *profanum* or “that which is opposite the temple.”

In short the putatively self-evident sacred-profanе distinction that has been crucial to the construction of the modern category of “religion” is not similarly constitutive of Islam. Now, there is not much point in applying, to a given phenomenon, a concept constituted by a binary distinction if it fails in its basic conceptual and analytical function of making a clear binary distinction with regard to that phenomenon. If we cannot clearly distinguish secular/profanе from religious/sacred with regard to Islam, then we should accept that this economy of meaning operates by some other measure of value and form of currency, and should attempt to conceptualize the circulation of meaning in that economy on different terms.⁷¹ When we organize the world in terms of the sacred/religion vs. secular/non-religion binary, this just does not help us in—indeed, actively obstructs us from—recognizing and grasping central ways in which Muslims have conceptualized *being Muslim*. Which is another way of saying that the historical self-consciousness and imaginary of being Muslim is just not the same as “this imaginary . . . the modern form of

⁷¹ Samer Akkach says: “The most significant challenge the Islamic tradition poses to both Otto's and Eliade's polarized thinking is the lack of polarity . . . This does not mean, of course, that in premodern Islam there were no conceptions of the sacred . . . but that the understanding and construction of the ‘sacred’ itself was different. Conceptually, a ‘sacred’ without a profane must necessarily be different from a ‘sacred’ with a profane,” Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, 164–165. The question is whether it is possible to reconceptualize one term in a binary such that it is *not* dependent for its meaning on its relationship to the other. As it is, the particularity of the concept of “sacred” as constitutive of “religion/religious” in distinction from non-religion/non-religious has been criticized and increasingly rejected over the past twenty years. For example, Stewart Guthrie has spoken bluntly of the “vagueness” of the concept of the sacred: “In its main current usage, the notion of the sacred has a cluster of related but broad meanings—separation, specialness, value—that can apply to any domain,” Stewart Guthrie, “The Sacred: A Sceptical View,” in Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (editors), *The Sacred and its Scholars: Comparative Methodologies for the Study of Primary Religious Data*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996, 124–138, at 130. William E. Paden conceptualizes the sacred as “*upholding the integrity of one's world system against violation*. Notably, such order is a potential factor in the constitution of *all* social worlds . . . Sacred order is a broader concept than religion. It is not a uniquely religious category . . . but religion is one of its primary and prototypical expressions,” William E. Paden, “Sacrality as Integrity: ‘Sacred Order’ as a Model for Describing Religious Worlds,” in Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (editors), *The Sacred and its Scholars: Comparative Methodologies for the Study of Primary Religious Data*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996, 3–18, at 4–16. More than one scholar has suggested that “if we are to use the word sacred . . . it can be used to refer to those things fundamentally valued by a community,” Fitzgerald, “A Critique of ‘Religion,’ ” 96.

critical self-consciousness and associated . . . mode of critical thinking” which “consists in the notion of a divided self-conscious subject”⁷²—a subject divided self-consciously between the religious and the secular. To accomplish this we require a concept that allows us to see a configuration like *kajkulāhī* not as secular/sacred, or as “Islamic humanism,” but simply *as Islam*.⁷³

To conceptualize Islam in terms of the religious/sacred versus secular binary is both an anachronism and an epistemological error the effect of which is to *remake* the historical object-phenomenon in the terms of Western modernity. Thus, in “laïcist” Turkey, when the legal—in more senses than one: *constitutional*—institutionalization of the category of the secular arrived, with the 1925 Law on Headdress, at the prescription of secular, modern, Western, brimmed hats, the *kulāh* (also, of course, the *fez* and the turban)—crooked or not—was duly proscribed, and effectively categorized as non-modern, non-secular, “religious” apparel.⁷⁴ Until this time and place the *kulāh* had not been “religious”—that is, non-secular—apparel for the simple reason that the world had not yet been re-constituted in terms of the religious-secular binary. The reconstitution of the *kulāh* in modern Turkey is thus a small symptom of the larger reconstitution of the world in terms of the religious-secular binary by the regime of modernity—a reconstitution largely carried out by the modern (colonial or nationalist) state *via* interventionary legal acts of epistemological

⁷² Mandair and Dressler, “Modernity, Religion-Making, and the Post-Secular,” 5.

⁷³ A similar conceptual weakness dogs Thomas Bauer’s recent proposal to view pre-modern Islam as a “culture of ambiguity.” Invaluable, Bauer documents and describes a great deal of ambiguity in, especially, the Arabic-language discourses of pre-modern Muslims prior and adjacent to the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. However, he does not interrogate the categories of “religious” and “secular,” nor of “culture,” but rather treats ambiguity in terms of these categories, which he evidently regards as inherently valid and with which he operates. In his conceptualization and analysis of the significance and meaning of ambiguity he thus falls into many of the deficiencies consequent upon the application of these categories that have been diagnosed above: one such acutely symptomatic instance of this will be noted in Chapter 6. Bauer’s book, regrettably, came to my attention only very late in the course of my writing, when I had already completed a full draft of *What is Islam?* else I might have engaged with it in more detail in the main body of my book. See Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams*, Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011.

⁷⁴ Western hats were prescribed, as a part of the larger project of removing Islam as an agent of public norms, on the basis that they were “civilized” and “modern.” As Camilla Nereid straightforwardly puts it, “During this process, Islam was construed as representing something other than modernity,” Camilla Nereid, “Kemalism on the Catwalk: The Turkish Hat Law of 1925,” *Journal of Social History* 44 (2011) 707–728, at 707. Hale Yılmaz notes that “the *külah* was a popular Ottoman headgear particularly among the artisanal classes,” Hale Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013, 234 note 16 (for an extensive treatment of the Hat Law, see 29–77); also Yasemin Doğaner, “The Law on Headdress and Regulations on Dressing in the Turkish Modernization,” *Bilik* 51 (2009) 33–54.

coercion. By conceptualizing Islam in terms of the religious/secular binary in our own analysis, we perpetuate that epistemological coercion.⁷⁵

Kajkulāhī is both symptomatic and productive of a relational structure of meaning that is not quite grasped by the religion-sacred versus secular binary—and something meaningful is lost when we conceive of *kajkulāhī* in terms of that binary. Certainly one importantly meaningful thing we lose is the sense of the *location of tension* in the constitution of value and meaning in societies of Muslims. To conceptualize in terms of religion/sacred versus secular/profane is to locate this tension in that binary—that is, between values that are secular and values that are religious. In each instance we ask the question “is this value religious/sacred or this is value secular/profane?” *Kajkulāhī*—symptomatic and expressive of Islam itself—straddles this binary; which is another way of saying that it does not fit the binary. Thus, rather than look for tensions and contradictions between secular and Islamic, we should be looking to understand the tensions and contradictions between Islamic and Islamic—here, between the legal construction of the meaning of Islam and the crooked-hatted construction of the meaning of Islam—and *to conceptualize those tensions and contradictions as Islam*.⁷⁶



The force of the conceptual reflex or analytical habit of falling back on the term “secular” in conceptualizing Islam is pervasive among scholars and laymen alike. It will be helpful to illustrate this point I am making through three more examples. First, the sociologist, Said Amir Arjomand, tries to find a language by which to characterize Naṣir-ud-Dīn Tūsī (whom we have already mentioned as the author of the *Akhlaq-i Nāṣīrī*, the foundational work of

⁷⁵ Following Talal Asad, Markus Dressler has spoken of the “world-ordering machinery of secularism,” which he identifies with “political projects that are actively involved in differentiating between religious and secular spaces, symbols, bodies and practices,” Markus Dressler, “Making Religion through Secularist Legal Discourse: The Case of Turkish Alevism,” in Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (editors), *Secularism and Religion-Making*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 187–208, at 193 and 188. It is worth restating the observation of Seval Yıldırım cited in Chapter 1: “It is crucial to remember that secularism is first and foremost realized through law. It is the laws of the new nation that tell the masses what they are and are not allowed to do with their religious beliefs and practices,” Yıldırım, “The Search for Shared Idioms,” 237.

⁷⁶ It might be argued that to conceptualize *kajkulāhī* as Islam is to accept the claim of the crooked-hatted against the claim of the legalists: my point is that as analysts and historians we are obliged to accept the claim to Islam of the crooked-hatted as an instance of human and historical Islam, without prejudice to the claim of the legalists that this is not Islam—and are thus obliged to conceptualize Islam in terms encompassing of and coherent with *kajkulāhī*.

political thought in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex). Arjomand notes that Tūsī, “held fast to the opinions of the early philosophers,” and that he was a longtime Ismā‘ilī Shī‘ī (in Arjomand’s terms “radical heterodox”) who wrote the *Akhlaq* while in service of the last Ismā‘ilī ruler in Northern Iran, then abandoned the sinking Ismā‘ilī ship, converted to Twelver Shi‘ism (in Arjomand’s terms “moderate heterodox”), and entered the service of the pagan Mongol Khan Hülegü, to whom he dedicated his book. Arjomand states, “Tūsī’s heterodoxy entailed . . . his love of secular culture and the dislike of all religious doctrines, which he considered distortions of the same ultimate truth.”⁷⁷

Now, Tūsī without doubt “held fast to the opinions of the early philosophers,” who, as we have seen, viewed Real-Truth as hierarchically above Prophetic-Revealed-Truth. He was also the leading natural scientist of his age, and authored what became the seminal work of astronomy for the subsequent centuries. But it is difficult to see what is meaningfully conveyed by identifying him with “secular culture” and a “dislike of all religious doctrines” when he also wrote a work, the *Tajrīd al-kalām*, or *Abstracta Theologica*, that became the foundational text for the study of theology in the Bengal-to-Balkans *madrasah* curricula followed by both Sunnis and Shī‘ah,⁷⁸ and also began his great work on politics and ethics (written for a pagan patron) with the following exordium in which the text in italics is quoted from the Qur’ān, and that in quotation marks from *hadīth qudsī* (non-Qur’ānic Divine speech):

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

Praise without limits and lauds unencumbered befit the Majesty of kingdom-possessing might, who, as in the beginning of the primal genesis *And it is He who originates creation*,⁷⁹ brings forth the realities of the species from the preludes of generation; and who converted the primary-matter of Man (having the brand of the world of creation) forty times, in

⁷⁷ Said Amir Arjomand, “Islam and the Path to Modernity: Institutions of Higher Learning and Secular and Political Culture,” in John P. Arnason, Armando Salvatore, and Georg Stauth (editors), *Islam in Process—Historical and Civilizational Perspectives*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006, 241–257, at 250.

⁷⁸ This was a work so definitive to the introductory level of the highly-organized Ottoman *madrasah* education system, that the *madrasahs* where it was taught were named after the supercommentaries (*hāshiyah*) on the work as “Supercommentary-on-the-*Tajrid* Madrasahs” [*Hāsiyyeh-i Tajrīd medreseh*]. An early printed edition containing the commentary of the Sunni Shāfi‘ī Ash‘ari, Mahmūd b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Isfahānī (d. 1349), is *Sharḥ Tajrīd al-‘aqā’id li-al-Tūsī*, Tabriz; As‘ad Kitābṣarūsh, 1263 sh [1884].

⁷⁹ *huwa alladhī yabda’u al-khalq*, Qur’ān 30:27 al-Rūm.

ascending degrees towards perfection, from form to form and state to state (“Forty mornings with my hand I kneaded Adam’s clay”)⁸⁰; till when it reached utmost order, and there appeared in it the mark of attainment to fitting receptivity. He clothed it, all at one (*Our commandment is but one word*),⁸¹ by *Be and it is*⁸² and *As a twinkling of the eye or closer*,⁸³ in the garment of human form, which bore the pattern of the world of command *And he sends down the spirit of His bidding*).⁸⁴ Thus its primal existence received the sign of completion and the cycle of formation reached secondary being, and it made ready to bear the divine deposit: *Then we produced him as another creature*,⁸⁵ corresponding to the beginning of genesis in the repetition of production (*Then He brings it back again*).⁸⁶ Man’s spirituality (which is the principle of existence of his form’s specificity, and which was brought into being there i.e. at the beginning of existence, in a twinkling) He causes to pass through the academy of *Taught man what he knew not*⁸⁷ and the workshop of *Do you righteously*,⁸⁸ stripping the essence and refining the attributes, progressing up the ascending degrees of perfection and adorning with righteous deeds, year by year and state by state, step by step and stage by stage; until at length He brings it to the appointed place of *Return to thy Lord*⁸⁹ and all at once asks back its borrowed form, which was the primal dress of human

⁸⁰ *khammartu tīnat ādam bi-yaday-ya arba‘īna šabāhan*. This Hadith does not appear in any of the canonical collections; it does appear, in slightly different versions, in important Qur’ān commentaries, including that of Muḥammad b. Jarir al-Tabarī (d. 923), *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta‘wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Babī al-Halabī, 1954 (2nd edition), 3:225–226 (in the commentary on Qur’ān 3:27 Āl-‘Imrān: “And You bring the living out of that which is dead, and the dead out of that which is living [wa tukhrīju al-hayya min al-mayyiti wa tukhrīju al-mayyita min al-hayyi]”); in Maṇṣūr b. Muḥammad al-Sam‘ānī (1035–1096), *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (edited by Abī Tamīm Yāsīr b. Ibrāhīm), Riyadḥ: Dār al-Waṭān, 1997, 3:137, and al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣ‘ūd al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-musammā Ma‘alim al-tanzil*, Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1968, 3:49 (in the commentary on Qur’ān 15:28 al-Hijr, “And, lo! Your Lord said to the angels: ‘I am creating a human from a clay of moulded mud! [idh qāla rabbu-ka li-al-malā‘ikah in-ni khāliqun basharan min ṣalsilin min hama‘in masnūn]’”). It is also invoked by al-Ghazzālī in the *Iḥyā*: Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā ‘ulūm al-dīn*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-‘Āmirah, 1909, 5:194.

⁸¹ *wa ma amru-nā illā wāhidatun*, Qur’ān 54:50 al-Qamar.

⁸² *kun fa-yakūn*, Qur’ān 2:117 al-Baqarah.

⁸³ *ka-lamhī al-baṣāri aw huwa aqrab*, Qur’ān 16:77 al-Nahl.

⁸⁴ *yunazzilu al-malā‘ikata bi-al-rūḥ min amri-hi*, Qur’ān 16:2 al-Nahl (the word *al-malā‘ikata* is missing from Ṭūsī’s citation).

⁸⁵ *thumma ansha‘nā-hu khalqan ākhar*, Qur’ān 23:14 al-Mu’mīnūn.

⁸⁶ The allusion is to “Then We bring it back again [*thumma yu‘īdu-hu*],” Qur’ān 20:104 al-Anbiyā’.

⁸⁷ *‘allama al-insāna mā lam ya‘lam*, Qur’ān 96:5 al-‘Alaq.

⁸⁸ *i‘malū sālihan*, Qur’ān 23:51 al-Mu’mīnūn, Qur’ān 34:11 Saba’.

⁸⁹ *irji‘ī ilā rabbi-ka*, Qur’ān 89:38 al-Fajr.

primary-matter, and which in primal being had been distinguished by so much kneading and nurture: *When their term comes they shall not delay it by a moment nor put it forward.*⁹⁰ And so the call *Whose is the kingdom today?*⁹¹ with the answer *God's, the One, the Omnipotent,*⁹² comes down from kingdom-possessing Majesty into the void of the worlds of dominion and power; and the time comes for *All things perish save His face,*⁹³ and the promise *As he originated you, so ye shall return*⁹⁴ is fulfilled; and the mystery of “I was a hidden treasure”⁹⁵ attains completion. *That is the ordinance of the Almighty, the All-knowing.*⁹⁶

Practical Philosophy [*hikmat-i ‘amali*] is the acknowledgement of benefits in voluntary movements and disciplined acts on the part of the human species, in a way that conduces to the ordering of man's life here and hereafter . . . It should be recognized that the principles of beneficial works and virtuous acts on the part of the human species (implying the ordering of their affairs and states) lie, fundamentally, either in nature or in convention. The principle of nature applies in cases whose particulars conform to the understanding of people of insight and the experiences of men of sagacity, unvarying and unchanging with the variations of ages or the revolutions in modes of conduct and traditions. Where the principle lies in convention, if the cause of the convention be the agreed opinion of the community thereon, one speaks of Manners and Customs; if the cause of the convention be, however, the exigency of the opinion of a great man, fortified by divine assistance, such as a prophet or an imam, one speaks of Divine Ordinances.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ *fa-idhā jā'a ajalu-hum lā yasta'khirūna sā'atan wa lā yastaqdimūna*, Qur'an 33:34 al-A'rāf.

⁹¹ *li-man al-mulku al-yawma*, Qur'an 40:16 al-Ghāfir.

⁹² *li-Allāhi al-wāhid al-qahhār*, Qur'an 40:16 al-Ghāfir.

⁹³ *kullu shay'in hālikun illā wajhi-hi*, Qur'an 28:88 al-Qiṣas.

⁹⁴ *ka-mā bada'-kum ta'udūn*, Qur'an 7:39 al-A'rāf.

⁹⁵ This is the famous Hadith *qudsi*, “I was a hidden treasure and wished that I be known, so I created creation [*kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan fa-aradtu / abhabtu an u'rāfa fa-khalqtu khalqan*]. It appears in no canonical Hadith collection, but was widely invoked by Sufis who considered it validated not by the human transmission of Hadith methodology, but by Divine revelation to Sufis; see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi's Metaphysics of the Imagination*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, 250.

⁹⁶ *dhālika taqdīr al-‘azīz al-ḥakīm*, Qur'an 36:38 Yā Sin. I have reproduced the translation of Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 23–24; for the original, see Tūsi, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī*, 33–34.

⁹⁷ I have reproduced the translation of Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 28–29; for the original, see Tūsi, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī*, 40.

Again: it is difficult to know what *meaning* is gained from identifying the author of the above passage—which presents a Neo-Platonic Avicennan emanationist cosmology of creation by way of citations from the Qur’ān and Hadith, and which forcefully emphasizes the place of the Prophet Muhammad in the salvation of humankind—with *secular culture*. Michael McKeon has written that “what is crucial to the process of secularization . . . is the categorical self-consciousness itself, the preoccupation with the fundamental problem of boundaries.”⁹⁸ There is nothing to suggest here that Ṭūsī has any categorical self-consciousness, pre-occupation or, indeed, notion of separate domains of truth, the one public and profane, the other private and sacred, the one religious and the other secular, or that he regarded Divine Revelation (putative “religion”) as having no place in the government and public affairs of men. What we do get a clear a sense of is that Ṭūsī, in the manner of the classical Islamic philosophers, conceptualizes the idea and text and reading of the Revealed Qur’ān—which he clearly recognizes as a source for Truth—as subject to and in integration with the independent hermeneutical authority of Reason. But this does not render him “secular”: rather it renders him an *Islamic* philosopher and rationalist—unless we insist, with Ernest Renan, that “there had never been, there could not be, such a thing as a Muslim scientist: science had indeed existed and been tolerated inside Islamic society, but the scientists and philosophers were not really Muslim.”⁹⁹ In trying to find a means by which to *comprehend* Ṭūsī, who is, after all, representative of a major social and intellectual type and trajectory in Islamic history—representative of a *particular type of Muslim* and thus of a *particular type of Islam*—Arjomand seems here to be trapped within the available categories of the analytical language of Western Modernity—categories into which Ṭūsī simply does not fit—and has thus ended up collapsing the concepts of philosopher, heterodox, secular and anti-religious.¹⁰⁰ If we are to find a means by which to

⁹⁸ Michael McKeon, “Politics of Discourses and the Rise of the Aesthetic in Seventeenth-Century England,” in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (editors), *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 35–51, at 35.

⁹⁹ Albert Hourani, “Islam and the Philosophers of History,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 3 (1967) 206–268, at 250.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander Key rightly points out in a thoughtful critique, “When twentieth-century authors use the word ‘humanism’ as a term that includes the concept of ‘secularism’, they . . . are using a post-Enlightenment European movement to describe a tenth-century Islamic reality . . . No labeled concept can be usefully projected backwards in time onto a previous context,” Alexander Key, “The Applicability of the Term ‘Humanism’ to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī,” *Studia Islamica* 100/101 (2005) 71–112, at 85, and 105. Unfortunately, Key then goes on to speak of the “negotiation between the potentially rival truth claims of religion and philosophy” thereby him-

understand Tūsī and his kind, we must evidently do so in and on different terms.¹⁰¹



Arjomand's treatment of Tūsī displays the deleterious effect that conceptualizing Islam in terms of the religious-versus-secular binary can have for understanding an individual Muslim. That the conceptualization of Islam as religion debilitates our understanding of the entire narrative of the history of Muslims is evident in the following presentation of the relationship between "State and Religion in Islamic Societies"¹⁰² by Ira M. Lapidus (the author of the massive and widely-read *A History of Islamic Societies*¹⁰³ which presents the history of societies of Muslims from the beginning of Islam to the present day).

A hallowed cliché obscures our vision of the structures of pre-modern, pre-nineteenth century Islamic state and religious organization. We commonly say that in Muslim societies state and religion were unified and that Islam is a total way of life which defines political as well as social and familial life: a religion of collective organization and private morals. This is, of course, the common Muslim view embodied in the ideal of the Prophet and the early Caliphate. In the golden era of Islam, the Prophet and the early Caliphs were rulers and teachers, repositories of both temporal and religious authority, whose mission was to lead the community in war and morality. The religious community and the state were one . . .

self using the concept of "religion" in counter-distinction to "philosophy" in what is effectively an application of the labeled post-Enlightenment European concept "religion" in opposition to its binary "secular"—the role of "secular" being here played by "philosophy."

¹⁰¹ For a subtle demonstration of the obstructive effect of conceptualizing in terms of "religious" and "secular," see the study by Kamran I. Karimullah on the teaching of ethics and morality in the context of the modernization of Ottoman education in the post-Tanzimat nineteenth century, where it is argued that while "Ottoman morality texts inspired by the modern tradition of secular morality . . . differ categorically from the native Islamic *akhlāq* tradition . . . this difference, however, is not observable when considered in terms of the texts' 'religious' or 'secular' content," Kamran I. Karimullah, "Rival Moral Traditions in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1839–1908," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 24 (2013) 37–66, at 44–45.

¹⁰² This was first put forward in Ira M. Lapidus, "Islam and Modernity," in S. N. Eisenstadt (editor), *Patterns of Modernity. Volume II: Beyond the West*, London: Frances Pinter, 1987, 89–115; and then re-elaborated in Ira M. Lapidus, "State and Religion in Islamic Societies," *Past and Present* 151 (1996) 3–27.

¹⁰³ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (a third edition was published in 2014).

This unity, it is widely recognized, was soon lost . . . Most Muslim societies did not and do not conform to this ideal. In fact they were and are built around separate state and religious institutions. This differentiation first took place in the eighth and ninth centuries when the Caliphate differentiated into a secular political regime and parallel Muslim communal and religious associations, separated by organization, elites and values. The separation of state institutions became the norm for the late Abbasid Caliphate, the post-Abbasid Saljuq and Mamluk Sultanates, the Ottoman, Safavid and Mogul empires, the Amirate of Bukhara, the Hafsid regime and its successors in Tunisia, the Malay Sultanates, Sudanese West African states and other Muslim societies.

At the heart of almost all these states was an ambiguity about Islam. On the cultural level, they were Muslim states committed to the defense and patronage of Muslim worship, education, law and *jihad*; yet their legitimization also included important non-Muslim features such as patrimonial claims to superior ancestry, a state-patronized artistic and literary culture based on the heritage of pre-Islamic societies, and appeals to universal cosmological, scientific or philosophic concepts as the basis of the right to rule. The culture of these regimes derived from the pre-Islamic and non-Islamic substrates of the societies they ruled. Local languages, poetic traditions, literary forms, architectural motifs, musical themes and cultic practices marked each Muslim regime as an expression of a particular locality. The several levels of Islamic cosmopolitanism, imperial and local cultures afforded each Muslim regime a distinctive non-Muslim dimension.

These Muslim states ruled over societies organized into a multitude of religiously-defined and religiously-led social groups. Such associations included schools of law, Sufi *tariqat* (brotherhoods), Sufi lineages, Sufi shrine communities, Shi'a sects and *jamatbandis* (communities or corporations), and reformist movement led by *ulama* and Sufis . . . In any case, all Muslim societies were composed of associational or confessional groups based on religious values and religious leadership. These groups were generally detached from and sometimes opposed to state regimes. Most withdrew from participation in government and were primarily concerned with solidarity, worship, education, law, individual morality and the public upholding of the symbols of Islam.¹⁰⁴

Thus in the pre-modern era there were two alternative concepts of Islamic society. One was the "Caliphate" which integrated the state and

¹⁰⁴ Lapidus, "Islam and Modernity," 90–91.

the community, the realms of politics and religion, into an inseparable whole. The second was the “Sultanate” or secular states which ruled over the quasi-independent religious associations that were the true bearers of Muslim religious life. In either case, the very concept of an Islamic state was ambiguous because pre-modern states inherited and maintained a cultural identity, a social organization, political institutions and a system of economy defined in non-Islamic terms.¹⁰⁵

So, in Lapidus’ master-narrative, the state is “religious” only for a short phase of the history of Muslims—for just so long as the Caliphate unites “state” and “religious” institutions. After this, regimes come into being which are to be called “secular” because under them “religious” life passes from the state to “quasi-independent religious associations.” “At the heart of almost all these states” Lapidus identifies “an ambiguity about Islam” because “their legitimation also included important non-Muslim features” drawn from the pre-Islamic imperial and local culture. This engagement with the pre-Islamic and the local produces something that Lapidus calls “Islamic cosmopolitanism”; yet that very cosmopolitanism renders the “culture” of the state less than properly “religious”—as Lapidus puts it elsewhere, “these states were not considered inherently Islamic.”¹⁰⁶ Cosmopolitanism, it seems, is necessarily less than wholly “Muslim.”

I do not have the space here to respond to Lapidus with a detailed historical survey (although some relevant material from the history of Muslims’ political thought will be cited at length in Chapter 6). But if what makes the religious associations “the true bearers of Muslim religious life” is that they were “primarily concerned with solidarity, worship, education, law, individual morality and the public upholding of the symbols of Islam,” then it is difficult to understand the substantive difference between these activities and those of the post-Caliphal state that is “committed to the defense and patronage of Muslim worship, education, law and *jihad*.” Rather, it would appear that both parties, the state and the non-state associations, are engaged in the *same* project: the project of Islam.

¹⁰⁵ Lapidus, “Islam and Modernity,” 93. Also, “Thus we have two principal Islamic theories of the nature of an ideal Muslim political society. One looks to a unified state and society under the leadership of a caliph whose authority extends to all realms of personal and public concern. The second tacitly recognized the institutional division between the structures of state and religion and looks to the religious sphere for personal and communal fulfillment,” Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” 24–25.

¹⁰⁶ Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” 13.

Also, if the post-Caliphal stratagems of putting forward “patrimonial claims to superior ancestry,” and a “state-patronized artistic and literary culture based on the heritage of pre-Islamic societies” are to be seen as arguments for “the basis of the right to rule . . . derived from the pre-Islamic and non-Islamic substrates” and are *thus* “secular,” then one wonders what the establishment by the Umayyads, within fifty years of the death of the Prophet, of the principle of dynastic Caliphal succession by pre-Islamic tribal descent amounts to if not an example of “patrimonial claims to superior ancestry.” One wonders further what the adoption by the Umayyads of pre-Islamic forms of coinage and public architecture, and what the patronage of poetry and art at the Umayyad court are—if not “a state-patronized artistic and literary culture derived from the pre-Islamic and non-Islamic substrates.” It is revealing that Lapidus himself traces the “breakdown of the initial concept and the progressive separation of religious and political authority” already to the Umayyad period.¹⁰⁷ On this score, the *religious* state does not survive the period of the Rightly-Guided/Rightly-Guiding Caliphs (*al-khulafā’ al-rāshidūn*). If this sounds like “the golden era of Islam” paradigm that Lapidus identifies at the outset, it is because it *is* the “golden era of Islam” paradigm—indeed, it is, for all practical and conceptual purposes, Salafi historiography of the first rank where the original paradigm of Islam is maintained and expressed only in the first three generations of Muslims (the *salaf*), after which the authenticity of the original article is progressively corrupted. Indeed, Lapidus never disagrees with the paradigm; rather, he confirms for us that the unitary state-religion model did not survive the end of Arab rule and the coming of the Turks.

The Saljuqs . . . defined the political institutions of the new era . . . In principle, they recognized the legitimacy of the caliphate. They portrayed themselves as the defenders of Islam. They enforced Islamic law,

¹⁰⁷ “The subsequent evolution of the caliphate, however, led to a breakdown of the initial concept and the progressive separation of religious and political authority. To sustain their authority, the caliphs adopted the trappings of Byzantine and Sassanian imperial power alongside their Islamic identity. The Umayyad dynasty incorporated Byzantine artistic, architectural and ceremonial motifs into the caliphal court and into the palaces and mosques constructed by the dynasty. The ‘Abbāsid dynasty, in its turn, patronized Hellenistic philosophy and science, Pahlavi literature, and other aspects of the Middle Eastern imperial cultural tradition . . . Thus the caliphs, who began as the deputies and successors to the Prophet, attempted to combine their religious authority with routine forms of Middle Eastern imperial, cultural and institutional authority. Though the religious claims of the caliphate did not lapse, the institution increasingly resembled the former Middle Eastern empires,” Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” 9–10.

patronized the pilgrimage, endowed colleges of learning and religious activity, and sometimes waged *jihād* against non-Muslim populations . . . None the less, these states were not considered inherently Islamic. Turkish regimes looked back to their tribal ancestry and their conquest as the basis of dynastic legitimacy. By the cultivation of local languages, poetic traditions, architectural motifs, musical themes and cultic practices, or through universalistic, rationalistic, cosmological, philosophical and scientific pursuits, Middle Eastern states asserted a legitimacy independent of religion, and identified themselves as cosmopolitan, imperial and patrimonial regimes based on non-Muslim civilizations.¹⁰⁸

The newly-dominant conquering Turkish peoples and slave war-lords, eager to calm resistance, to assure the passivity of the governed populations and the steady flow of taxes, decided to use the local religious élites and the existing communal structures as a mechanism to enforce and facilitate their rule. To do this they accepted the caliph as the nominal head of the Islamic community. They agreed to enforce Islamic law. They suppressed Shiism by force and assisted in the triumph of Sunni Islam throughout much of the Middle East. They upheld at least some of the symbols of an Islamic order in the ceremonial, literary and artistic statements of the courts. In order to secure the co-operation of the local religious élites, the Saljuqs constructed mosques and *madrasas* in every major city, endowed them with funds to train students and religious cadres and made themselves the patrons of the people who spread Islam, administered local affairs and taught obedience to the regime. Patronage allowed them to influence the appointments of judges and teachers, and gave the state indirect control over a religious establishment dependent upon it for financial support.¹⁰⁹

In Lapidus' characterization, the relationship of the Saljuqs to Islam is presented as definitively instrumental. Thus, the Saljuqs "portray themselves as the defenders of Islam," and "to assure the passivity of the governed populations and the steady flow of taxes . . . decided to use the local religious élites and the existing communal structures as a mechanism to enforce and facilitate their rule. To do this they accepted the caliph as the nominal head of the Islamic community. They agreed to enforce Islamic law."

It is difficult to read this without emerging with a marked sense of a sincerity-deficit on the part of the Saljuqs. More to the point, however, the

¹⁰⁸ Lapidus, "State and Religion in Islamic Societies," 13.

¹⁰⁹ Lapidus, "State and Religion in Islamic Societies," 15.

Saljuqs—and by the same token, the centuries of rulers who come after them—are presented as suffering an Islam-deficit. Unable to muster sufficient “religious” credentials, they resort to “the cultivation of local languages, poetic traditions, architectural motifs, musical themes and cultic practices . . . universalistic, rationalistic, cosmological, philosophical and scientific pursuits” to assert “a legitimacy independent of religion, and identified themselves as cosmopolitan, imperial and patrimonial regimes based on non-Muslim civilizations.” The wording here, and in the previously-quoted passage, is most revealing: for Lapidus, as soon as the “universalistic, rationalistic, cosmological, philosophical and scientific” are made “the basis of the right to rule,” we are no longer in the realm of the religious/Muslim, but of the secular/non-Muslim/cosmopolitan. The “Muslim” here is identified with the “religious” and the scope of the Muslim religious is imagined in the narrowest possible confinement. It is not imaginable here that Muslims, even several hundred years into “the venture of Islam” might themselves imagine *being Muslim* as fully embracing the making of the Muslim self by constituting the “right to rule” in terms of engagement with the “universalistic, rationalistic, cosmological, philosophical and scientific” (especially since what constitutes the right to rule is something that both God and His Prophet are formidably tight-lipped about). Instead, Lapidus’ formulation presents an originary *pure Muslim* condition—that of the Caliphate—constituted by its being integrally *religious* and *inherently Islamic*, which pure Muslim condition then becomes effectively *contaminated* by *non-Muslim* elements which render it not *religious* but “secular.” Neither is Lapidus alone in this formulation. Thus, in a large book entitled *God’s Rule: Government and Islam*, Patricia Crone states how “from the ninth century onwards, the political fragmentation of the Muslim world transferred power from the caliph to men who styled themselves amirs, kings, or sultans,” with the result that “government was now in the hands of rulers who were not successors to the Prophet, merely wielders of brute force . . . devoid of legal status and moral significance” and “profane,” whom Muslims “could never see . . . as intrinsically Islamic.” “In short, government had separated from religion.”¹¹⁰

However, looking through the Saljuqs’ *curriculum vitae* as laid out by Lapidus, one can only wonder what on earth it is that the Saljuqs would have had to have done to show themselves to be more “religious,” more concerned with “legal status” and “moral significance,” and as more “inherently”/“intrinsically” Islamic. Lapidus says that “the Saljuqs . . . defined the *political* institutions of

¹¹⁰ Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule: Government and Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 146–147.

the new era” (emphasis mine): in fact, the Saljuqs defined what, in Lapidus’ and Crone’s terms, are the *religious* institutions of the new era. It is under the Saljuq sultans, amirs, atabegs and their successor dynasties that the institution of the *madrasah* is firmly established and begins to proliferate through the Dār al-Islām as the primary locus of learning in societies of Muslims (especially of what Lapidus would call “religious learning”)—emblematic of which is the founding of the Nīzāmiyyah *madrasah* in Baghdad (the institution where al-Ghazzālī taught) by the Saljuq vizier, Nīzām-ul-Mulk in 1065. The proliferation of the *madrasah* as an institution of learning served, over the course of time, to consolidate and structure a shared curriculum of subjects (and often of texts) to be studied—which, in turn, served to create a more clearly-defined and regularly-constituted social body of ‘*ulamā*’, and also provided the structural means for the organization and corporatization of the four Sunni legal schools as communities of texts, teachers, students and doctrines reaching across time and space. These Sultans and amirs also patronized the Sufi institutions of the *khānqāh* and of the tomb-shrine, both of which provided a physical locus for the activities of the emerging Sufi orders whose discourses and practices and modes of self-construction proliferated through the Dār al-Islām in the “new era.” Rather than view these as the purely instrumental actions of a secular or profane elite seeking to advance its political interests of efficient government, or seeking to co-opt “religious” elites, these actions should be seen as statements and enactments of a commitment to the continuing construction and elaboration of shared Islamic values (and, in speaking of values, we should also not forget the enormous financial investment that went into the building and endowment of these institutions). In view of the close involvement and commitment by the personnel of the state to these projects, Lapidus’ insistence that “secular state” and “religious associations” are *separated* by organization, elites and values is bad history and bad theory. Rather, what we have here is the emergence of a new discursive economy of Islamic goods and values in which all educated elites participate, as well as a new political economy of patronage and negotiation over the mobilization and investment of these goods and values. What we have is a new historical constitution of Islam—which is no less intrinsically or inherently Islamic for being new (unless you are a Salafi historian for whom the new cannot be intrinsically or inherently Islamic).

Further, the self-conceptualization and public presentation of the new ruling institution of the Sultanate was made in what, in Lapidus’ and Crone’s language, are, again, precisely *religious* terms. As al-Māwardī (who died in 1058, the year that the Saljuqs conquered Baghdad), one of the first formulators of a theory of the Sultanate, pointed out, the Sultan is, on the authority

of Prophetic Hadiths, “God’s Shadow on Earth [*zill Allāh fi al-ard*],” “Indeed, God orders by the Sultan more than he does by the Qur’ān [*inna Allāh la-yaza‘u bi-al-sultān akthara mim-mā yaza‘u bi-al-qur’ān*]!” and also noted the saying of his contemporaries, “The Sultan is, in his person, an Imām to be followed; and is, in his conduct, a *dīn* laid down [*al-sultān fi nafsi-hi imām matbū‘ wa fi sirati-hi dīn mashrū‘*]”.¹¹¹ Again: if this is not to view sultans as “intrinsically Islamic,” I don’t know what can be.¹¹² My point is not that the Sultanate is a *religious* institution (which term I have now put aside as actively unhelpful to the conceptualization of Islam): but rather that the Sultanate represents a (re-)ordering of the world in terms of Islam in which the religious-secular distinction is not present. There is no indication that these rulers regard themselves as acting in a separate domain of “secular” values, or that they, or anyone else, recognized the operation of two separately constituted domains of truth or of value—and, in any case, division of labour is not the same thing as division of product. Thus, when Lapidus concludes that “there were two alternative concepts of Islamic society . . . the ‘Caliphate’ which integrated the state and the community, the realms of politics and religion, into an inseparable whole” and “the second was the ‘Sultanate’ or secular states” that separated the two realms, this is simply wrong. It is certainly true that what we have here is a “new era”—indeed, what we have is what will become the Balkans-to-Bengal era—but it is *not* a new era marked by secular and religious. Rather, it is a new era constituted by Muslims in terms of new institutions and forms and discourses of what is integrally Islam/Islamic, the stated integrality of which the secular-religious distinction obstructs us from conceptualizing and understanding. It is, after all, the era that culminates in Jahāngīr’s wine-cup which proclaims him *unitarily* and *integrally* (and, inherently) Caliph, Sultan, King, Emperor, *ghāzī*-warrior and “Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical” by whom “the world found order”! No religious-secular binary here.



Even when scholars seek consciously to break out of the religious-secular binary in conceptualizing Islam, they seem to fall irresistibly back into it. An

¹¹¹ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabib al-BAṣrī al-Māwardī (edited by Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā), *Adab al-dunyā wa al-dīn*, Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1955, 121.

¹¹² Another example is that of the Shāfi‘ī Qādī of Mamlūk Damascus, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘ah (d. 1333) who “completely blurred the distinction between the imamate, the caliphate and the sultanate by deliberately alternate synonymous pairing of imam and sultan and, less frequently, the caliphate and the sultanate,” Arjomand, “Legitimacy and Political Organization,” 253.

instructive example of this is the thesis of a book entitled *Being a Muslim in the World* by the Iranian-American public intellectual, Hamid Dabashi.¹¹³

What does it mean to be a Muslim in this post-Western world? . . . The habitual binaries between “Islam and the West,” between “religion and secularism,” need to be discarded. These binaries have concealed more about Muslim worlds than they have revealed . . . Breaking that binary is a critical task we must undertake by way of retrieving the worlds that preceded it. I argue that being a Muslim in a post-Western world requires a critical rethinking of Islamic cosmopolitanism as Muslims lived it over many centuries. An active recollection of what cosmopolitanism entailed—one in which secularism means nothing—enables the possibility of inhabiting the renewed worldliness of Muslims’ lived experiences.

. . . The task today is . . . to recollect the cosmopolitan worldliness that thrived . . . To be a Muslim in the world today does not require an Islamic *reformation* . . . it requires the restoration of Islam back into its worldly disposition, remembering the conditions of pre-coloniality to deliver itself from the conditions of post-coloniality. Having been for over two centuries at the receiving end of European and American imperialism, Muslims will now have to retrieve that habitual dialogue, though not from a position of power but from a position of *care*—care of the other, of the world, that will in turn redefine who and what they are.¹¹⁴

To rethink Muslims in the world, we need to remember the creative cultures of medieval Islam and how their dialogical dispositions were conducive to the eventual creation of a multifaceted, syncretic and polyfocal civilization. We need to recall a broadly historical perspective that demonstrates the cosmopolitan character of the Islamic civilization in its varied forms and manifestations. We must pay particular attention to the rise of literary humanism (*Adab*) in its Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu contexts.¹¹⁵

Dabashi presents a historical diagnosis where Muslims have become, in their asymmetrical encounter with the power of European and American colonialism, bifurcated into false binaries (“religion and secular,” “Islam and West”) and have thus forgotten the true nature of their past. His rehabilitative prescription for *Being a Muslim in the World* is that Muslims must now

¹¹³ Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

¹¹⁴ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 2, 4, 9, 10.

¹¹⁵ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 12–13.

remember that true past in order to reconstitute themselves (one might say: to put themselves back together again). That rehabilitating past is characterized by the appealing qualities of creativeness, humanism, cosmopolitanism, polyfocality and multifacetedness—and, above all, Dabashi's key-concept, *worldliness*.

The goal is to retrieve the internal dynamics of Islam itself, breaking it down to its discursive, institutional, and symbolic forms—all competing with each other, remembering Islam anew as the constitutionally cosmopolitan culture that it has always been, and thus dialectically denying any one component of this multifaceted religion the presumption to assume a dominant, exclusionary, or defining moment.

... We need to make a distinction between “Islam” in its doctrinal foundations in the Qur'an and the Hadith literature and its juridical character in Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) on the one hand, and “Islam” as a lived experience that covers a vast range of symbolic, discursive, and institutional domains, on the other. The characterization of a society, thus, as “Islamic” certainly includes the fundamental beliefs and practices of its inhabitants as Muslims but is by no means limited—and might in fact be contrary—to such *doctrinal* principles and practices. Muslim worldly experiences thus reemerge as the locus classicus of a vast and diversified body of cosmopolitan mores and practices, ranging from the sacred to the mundane, and as such, remain irreducible either to narrowly Islamic or anti-Islamic, religious or anti-religious, sacred or secular . . . We need to retrieve a view of the vast and diversified Islamic heritage that is irreducible to Islamic *doctrinal* beliefs . . . Positing Islam as a cosmopolitan worldliness . . . will have a conclusively transformative impact on the way we ordinarily think of the terms “Islam” or “Islamic.”¹¹⁶

It would appear from this that Dabashi wants to conceptualize “Islam” in a manner that eliminates binaries, that accommodates contradiction, and that does not allow any one component to dominate. He objects to “the monolithic supposition of Islamic societies” (“invented by Orientalists”)¹¹⁷ which “has postulated a truth-claim by virtue of which the metanarrative of ‘Islam’ is believed to have had an overriding role in the history of a major universal civilization.”¹¹⁸ He says, “We must reach for a careful undoing of the *metaphysics of identity* at the root of such unexamined assumptions as ‘Islamic

¹¹⁶ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 13–14.

¹¹⁷ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 28.

¹¹⁸ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 31–32.

societies' and subvert it through the active agency of *a hermeneutics of alterity*. . . . I offer a counter-narrative under the rubric of 'worldly imagination'¹¹⁹

. . . The diversified Islamic heritage I propose here is predicated on *a hermeneutics of alterity* rather than *a politics of identity*. That hermeneutics of alterity I propose has always been definitive of Islamic intellectual history and worldly experiences. . . . "Islam" has never been a reduction of Muslims to what the Sunnis and Shi'is have thought of each other, or what mystics and philosophers have said about each other. Islam has been the metamorphic sublimation of the constellation of those dialectics.¹²⁰

While this conceptualization of Islam as "the metamorphic sublimation of the constellation of those dialectics" might seem a somewhat slippery conceptual swivel-hook on which to hang one's analytical coat, the reader might, nonetheless, imagine at this point that Dabashi intends to replace the Orientalists' monolithic conceptualization of Islam with a cosmopolitan conceptualization of Islam constituted by a "hermeneutics of alterity,"¹²¹ and by this to

¹¹⁹ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 29–30.

¹²⁰ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 14–15.

¹²¹ I will not dwell overly on Dabashi's concept of "hermeneutics of alterity" which is, in my view, an unnecessarily complicated and none-too-transparent way of saying that Islam is not a monolith, and that Muslims think and discourse in multiple ways. It is best to let Dabashi speak for himself: "I propose . . . a hermeneutics of alterity that makes proxy concepts, surrogate propositions, and permanently provisional propositions a counter-constitutional habit. Permanently substitutional, all propositions made in a hermeneutics of alterity are always on a standby status, acting as their own surrogates, their own potential understudies, with replacementarity being their chief counter-virtues. Oscillating between the two, replacementarity of the sacred and the mundane imaginations, which is at once both and neither, is the ironic mode in which this counter-narrative operates. Read in this way, individuals operate not in two exclusionary spaces of the sacred or the worldly, but on the active continuum of fictive/rhetorical bipolarities that unite and negate both. The supposition of any ontological access to the historical making of these, as any other, societies must commence with a simultaneous abandonment of all illusions of metaphysical certainties operative in such conceptual categories as 'Islamic societies' by actively cultivating the post-metaphysical, anti-representational groundlessness, Vattimo's *il pensiero debole* of multiple claims on historical allegiances of individuals, always politically anchored, never practically irrelevant . . . In all *unseriousness*, in a hermeneutic of alterity, a built-in Ibsenian supposition of 'on the other hand' is always there to subvert the slightest suggestion of inadvertent dogmatism that it itself might tend to harbor. Parsing ways between self-mockery and self-celebration, and thus able to laugh at itself freely, oscillating between the opposing ends—two or many—of all manners and metaphors, of all histories and stories, and on the wide and transgressive margins of those enabling doubts that love and hate their certainties with equal passion is where a hermeneutic of alterity rests its case, hangs its cause, places its bets, and feels most at home," Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 31–32, 35. Dabashi's "hermeneutics of alterity" does not gesture at Hans Robert Jauss' influential concept of the same name

effect “a conclusively transformative impact on the way we ordinarily think of the terms ‘Islam’ or ‘Islamic.’” Not so: for having set up the conceptual problem as one of distorting binaries which “conceal more than they reveal,” Dabashi slips—at first almost imperceptibly, and, ultimately, quite irretrievably (and against his own declared terms and agenda)—into such binaries himself, with *worldliness/alterity/culture* on one side of the binary, and *Islam/ic* on the other.

The seeds of this slippage are already sown above in his prescription of the “need to make a distinction between ‘Islam’ in its doctrinal foundations in the Qur’an and the Hadith literature and its juridical character in Islamic law (*Shari‘ah*) on the one hand, and ‘Islam’ as a lived experience that covers a vast range of symbolic, discursive, and institutional domains, on the other.” The flaw here lies in a two-fold erroneous representation of the Qur’ān that is pivotal to the emplotment of Dabashi’s narrative—and that it will be instructive to take up here because these are important misconceptions of the Qur’ān that are likely shared by many others. The first misconception is the notion that the definitive role of the Qur’ān—the text of Divine Revelation—in the lived experience of Muslims is/has been *the same as* that of the purposively prescriptive, prescriptive discourses of Hadith and law (neither of which is a text of Divine Revelation). This is the limited role of *doctrinal foundation*—“doctrine” being a term that Dabashi glosses as “fundamental beliefs and practices,” and which he also pairs with the noun “absolute” to present the phrase “doctrinal absolutes.”¹²² The second misrepresentation is that the Qur’ān is somehow either absent or not meaningfully present in “the vast range of symbolic, discursive, and institutional domains” that comprises “Islam as a lived experience” (as distinct from Islam as “doctrinal absolutes”). This is, quite simply, a critical misrepresentation of the nature of the role of the Qur’ān in the “internal dynamic of Islam itself.”

To address the first misrepresentation: the Qur’ān is far from a monolithic foundation of absolute doctrine. The ongoing role that the Qur’anic Revelation—as phenomenon, idea and text—has played in the historical experience of Muslims has not been that of foundation *simpliciter*, but rather of *foundational problem*. The intervention in the world of the Divine Author, Allah, has posed problems of *reading* and *meaning* on an order of conceptual complexity and socio-historical scale to which very few textual phenomena in human history can compare. These problems are inherent in the historical reality of Divine Revelation in a human language to an individual named Muhammad

(on which see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007, 98–104).

¹²² Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 47.

over the twenty-three year course of his Prophetic career in varied personal, prophetic and public circumstances and settings. They are also inherent in the *sui generis* content and literary style of the Qur’ān itself, which includes Divine self-characterization, eschatology, broad moral principles, specific legal prescription and proscription, lengthy historical narratives, parables, addresses by God to Muhammad sorting out his domestic affairs and counseling his emotional stresses, addresses by God to the community of Muhammad on matters of public policy, countless allusions to elements of seventh-century West Arabian historical and literary memory (ranging across appropriately remodeled histories of the prophets of the tribe of Israel, and of the Messiah of the Christians, and the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus), and various social and political arrangements of a local nature, as well as day-to-day events in the career of Muhammad, and unnamed individual persons in one way or another involved in his life. To adopt Dabashi’s own characterization of later “Islamic civilization,” above, one might say that the “dialogical dispositions” of the Qur’ān are nothing if not “multifaceted, syncretic and polyfocal.” Simply, the Qur’ān is a dizzying text—at turns humanly intimate and divinely awe-inspiring, concentrattingly prosaic and transportingly lyrical, self-referential and externally-allusive—the engagement with which makes extraordinary hermeneutical demands on the reader, who must ask: is the discourse of the Qur’ān divine or is it human or is it both? is it eternal or temporal or both? is it literal or metaphorical or both? is it context-dependent or context-independent or both? Each of these questions (as well as several others) is a fundamental variable of interpretative engagement that is inextricably and ineluctably implicated in *every human act of drawing meaning from or through or by way of the Qur’ān*: whatever meaning that an interpreter or community of interpreters gives to the Qur’ān is, in the first instance, contingent upon the combination of answers that the human interpreter gives to these questions, and on the specific constitution of each of those answers. The meaning of this Text of Divine Revelation is intrinsically susceptible to a vast range of interpretative responses—responses whose historical variety and difference defy reduction to “doctrinal absolutes.” As we have seen in Chapter 1, the identification of doctrinal absolutes is not an easy undertaking: the monotheist doctrinal absolute of *tawhīd*, or *exclusive* Divine Unicity, implodes into the crypto-pantheistic Akbarian concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*, the *inclusive* Unity of Being; the doctrinal absolute of the hard fact of the Day of Judgement, the Bliss of the Garden and the Torment of the Fire, are transformed into parables; the doctrinal absolute of the divine Messengership of Muḥammad does not settle whether his Hadith pronouncements establish irreducible norms. It is, in other words, extremely difficult to reduce even doctrinal

nal absolutes to doctrinal absolutes.¹²³ The historical role of the Qur'ān in "the dynamic of Islam" has been less to generate a fundament of *doctrinal absolutes* and more to generate a matrix of *semantic relativities*. Further, the variety of different meanings produced by Muslim engagement with the Qur'ān (and the vocabularies in which those meanings are expressed) are not limited to the domain of "fundamental beliefs and practice"; rather, these meanings are precisely diffused through, and of consequence for domains as multifarious as politics, society, ethics, aesthetics, cosmology, the iterations of ethnically diverse forms of quotidian life—and, not least, language and literariness. All of these are *informed* and *inflected* by the ubiquitous and ineluctable products of the Muslim engagement with the Qur'ān. Reducing the Qur'ān to "doctrinal absolutes" and eliding from "a lived experience of Islam" the myriad and ubiquitous *non-doctrinal relativities of meaning* produced by the human engagement with the Qur'ān produces a profound misrepresentation that is strategically crucial to Dabashi's formulation of a "counter-narrative under the rubric of 'a worldly imagination'.¹²⁴ For it is this very delimitation of the scope and consequence of Divine Revelation that enables him to typecast the Qur'ān in the dramatic role of mono-politan other-worldly foil to the actor that he puts forward as definitive and constitutive of Muslim "cosmopolitan worldliness": namely, *adab*—which he calls (in a loud, albeit unstated echo of Lenn Goodman) "literary humanism":

To remember the cosmopolitan worldliness of Muslims before their encounter with European colonial modernity there is no better place to start than with their vast and variegated field of *Adab*, or literary humanism¹²⁵... Although it is clear that Islamic scholasticism is unimaginable without the active unfolding of the Qur'ānic memory in juridical and theological directions, it is not also true that Arabic literary humanism is equally dependent on the Qur'ānic revelation... Persian humanism... in many of its dimensions... was either religiously syncretic, agnostic, or even blatantly anti-dogmatic. This is not positing Persian literary humanism as "anti-Islamic" but as integral to Muslim worldly experiences that are not entirely reducible to doctrinal absolutes.¹²⁶

... I offer a counter-narrative under the rubric of "worldly imagination." A panoramic view of historical societies in which the Qur'anic

¹²³ We have also seen, in this regard, Karamustafa's statement of the difficulty of pinning down the core of Islam.

¹²⁴ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 30.

¹²⁵ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 43.

¹²⁶ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 47.

memory has played a major role reveals that the holy Muslim scripture had to be staged in the context of other, equally powerful, memories . . . Privileging the sacred imagination that has been equally present in these societies, the term “Islamic societies,” among a host of other, similar, megaterms of power and domination, has spread a wide and outreaching net, claiming its putative constitution and disposition, and thus successfully submerging the active agency of forces that have negated and countered it . . . The retrieving of the terms of worldly imagination in the so-called Islamic societies, will have a number of immediate consequences . . . [W]e will come to realize that the hegemonic appellation “Islamic societies” is a principally political proposition that privileges one side of an historical interface—between the sacred and the mundane—over the other . . . If, indeed, we are successful in demonstrating the historical presence of modes of cosmopolitan imagination in communities so-far identified as “Islamic,” then we can argue for the existence of a continuous, almost uninterrupted, history in the multifaceted confrontation between the sacred and worldly imaginations in the widest and most pervasive senses of the terms.¹²⁷

Dabashi’s counter-narrative is thus oriented by the “confrontation . . . between two sides of an . . . interface”: the “sacred” and the “mundane.” Now if this is not a defining binary, I do not know what is: indeed, it is straightforwardly a restatement of the sacred/religious versus secular/profane binary with the role of secular/profane being played by the stand-in, “mundane.” Had Dabashi not protested quite so much against the religious/secular binary, we might more readily be forgiven for pointing out that, at bottom, in his conceptualization, “Islam” means “the religious” and “worldliness” means “the mundane/profane/secular.”

Consider such terms as “Islamic art,” “Islamic sciences,” “Islamic poetry,” or even “Islamic philosophy”—they are all categorically flawed, for the adjectival “Islamic” (in the strict sense of the term) does not do justice to the epistemic and aesthetic foregrounding of these disciplines and dispositions, nor indeed does “secularism.” Muslims are artists, poets, scientists and philosophers—but that fact does not make the art, poetry, science, or philosophy they do “Islamic,” any more than Marxism or psychoanalysis or quantum physics are “Jewish” because Marx, Freud and Einstein were Jews . . . Then why should Avicenna be called a Mus-

¹²⁷ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 30–31.

lim philosopher or Hafez a Muslim poet? Neither “Islam” nor “secularism” does justice to the philosophy or poetry Avicenna or Hafez practiced. They were Muslim, and one was a philosopher and the other a poet . . . That is irreducible to anything exclusively “Islamic” in the doctrinal sense of the term; nor do they warrant the term secular . . . Only in London or New York do people eat Chinese, Mexican, or Lebanese food. In China, Mexico, or Lebanon, people don’t eat Chinese, Mexican, or Lebanese food. They just eat food. That simple fact, the universality embedded in any particular, is what is lost when we turn something “Islamic” to distinguish it from “secular” or “Western.”¹²⁸

Dabashi firmly insists on persisting with the term Islam/Islamic “in the strict sense”—by which he means the “doctrinal” sense. In this way, he creates a circumstance where we *pre-emptively cannot* use the term “Islamic” in relation to the poetry of Hāfiẓ or the philosophy of Avicenna since these are not “irreducible to anything exclusively ‘Islamic’ in the doctrinal sense of the term”—and since there is apparently no other sense in which “Islamic” may be construed (the term is simply disabled). Dabashi does not even ask the question of whether the respective discourses of Hāfiẓ and Ibn Sīnā are somehow distinguished by the term “Islamic.” That is, he does not ask the question “What is the content of the qualifier ‘Islamic’?” Instead, he takes the position that the term “Islamic” is *disqualified* from qualifying any universal, because to qualify a universal by the term “Islamic” is to obliterate its universality. It is hard to grasp this last point: do we lose the universality of the term “intellectual” by qualifying it as “Marxist intellectual,” “Weberian intellectual,” or “Iranian intellectual”? If these are *meaningful* qualifiers, (why) is “Islamic” not? The questions that *should* be asked here are: “Does the use of the qualifier *add* something to the meaning of the universal?” “Does the qualifier help us see a meaning that the universal conceals?”¹²⁹ Dabashi does not even con-

¹²⁸ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 24–25.

¹²⁹ Abdulkader Tayob pointed out that “postmodernist” critics object to the use of Islam/Islamic on the basis that “The religio-cultural aspect of social forms is only one of several features, and cannot be used as a point of identification. Calling something an Islamic city, Islamic bank, or Islamic science implies that Islam is its major determining factor. In reality, according to the postmodern critique, such naming only hides and obscures other characteristics like ethnicity, ideology, and historical circumstances that equally determine social formation.” Tayob responds by saying, “In my view, such a critical deconstructivist approach . . . fails to consider how the actors themselves work with such symbols . . . No matter how elusive its character, the Islamic City—much like the Islamic leader, ritual, or court—is one of those compelling symbolic categories by which Muslims create history. The task of the social scientist is to locate these symbols in their broader social context, not to dissolve them,” Tayob, “Defining Islam in the Throes of Modernity,” 2–3.

sider this possibility: he has pre-determined that “Islamic” only causes *loss*. But, as we have seen as a straightforward historical matter, the respective *meanings* of the poetry of Hāfiẓ and the philosophy of Avicenna cannot fully or even adequately be grasped without cognizance of the fact that they were Muslim and were speaking from and to a “community of discourse” of Islam. Surely, *not* to call them Islamic is to impoverish their meaning, whereas to read them in referential terms of the vocabulary of Islam is to *enrich* their meaning. For Dabashi, however, the Islamic-ness of a society is axiomatically limited to the extent of its “doctrinal absolutes”: the less doctrinal, the less absolute, the less Islamic.

To the degree this civilization was “Islamic” it borrowed and assimilated quite a number of significant cultural traits into the bosom of the hermeneutic unfolding of its Qur’anic memories. The point of contention is . . . to question that degree or even nature of *Islamicity* and ask whether the *totalizing* categorization of “Islamic” does justice to the internal and syncretic dynamics, forces of self-contradictions, and dialectical disposition that constitute these so-called Islamic societies. What the term “Islamic societies” conceals is the . . . bipolarity of the sacred and mundane imaginations as they enter their respective narratives around the defining moments of theocentricity and anthropocentricity, respectively. The crucial tension between theocentricity and anthropocentricity in the sacred and secular imagination is the chief unresolved problematic of these, and indeed many other, societies.¹³⁰

“Islamic art” refers to an organicity of the sacred and the worldly that is unique unto itself and cannot be divided into the religious and the secular—and it is that organicity that I call “worldly.” . . . By privileging the term “Islamic culture” we have already decided on a notion of the *Islamicity* of that culture that categorically disfigures such non-scholastic (non-juridical, non-canonical) elements as those evident in the aesthetic imagination that, ipso facto, point to directions beyond, and indeed prohibited by, the letter of the law and the mandates of jurists.¹³¹

When Dabashi says that “the term ‘Islamic societies’ conceals . . . the bipolarity of the sacred and mundane imaginations as they enter their respective narratives around the defining moments of theocentricity and anthro-

¹³⁰ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 36–37.

¹³¹ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 60.

pocentrivity, respectively,” he is basically assigning the term “Islamic” to the sacred and the theocentric, and excluding it from the mundane and the anthropocentric. Thus, for him, the terms “Islamic societies” and “Islamic cultures” necessarily *conceal* and *disfigure* the phenomenon of self-contradiction (that which the term “Islamic” does *not* disfigure is the “letter of the law and the mandates of jurists”); which is to say that Islam, constitutionally, cannot be conceptualized in terms of the accommodation of contradiction in society and culture. On Dabashi’s terms, if we want to conceptualize a self-contradictory human and historical phenomenon, we must go *conceptually elsewhere* than “Islam”—which then renders the domain of contradiction something other than Islamic. My point, as outlined in Chapter 1, is that what is required is the contrary: namely, to conceptualize Islam in a manner that retains contradiction in a constitutionally coherent manner because this is the only way that we can map the human and historical reality of the internal contradictions of Islam.

Also, Dabashi’s axiomatic insistence on the “bipolarity of the sacred and mundane imaginations as they enter their respective narratives around the defining moments of theocentricity and anthropocentricity, respectively” simply fails to take into account the existence—never mind the social and imaginal prolificness—in the history of societies of Muslims of the Akbarian concept of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) in which, as Fazlur Rahman pointed out, “The basic motivation of Ibn al-‘Arabī in constructing his out-and-out monistic system is to reveal the greatness and centrality of man—the microcosm which reflects not only the ‘created’ universe but essentially the Deity: his system is *anthropocentric*.¹³² Far from expressing a *bipolarity* of the sacred and mundane imaginations, the concept of *al-insān al-kāmil* makes the cosmos in terms of man, and makes man in terms of the cosmos: to be Muslim in consciousness of the socially-prolific conception of the Perfect Man is precisely to live in a simultaneously and inter-prism-ically anthropocosmic/cosmoanthropic imagination and reality.¹³³

Dabashi states that “Islamic art” is a misnomer because it fails to characterize “the organicity of the sacred and the worldly that is unique unto itself and cannot be divided into the religious and the secular.” But his conceptual

¹³² Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī*, 19.

¹³³ On the concept of the Perfect Man, see Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid-Din Ibnul ‘Arabi*, 77–85; see also William C. Chittick, “The Anthropocosmic Vision in Islamic Thought,” in Ted Peters, Muzaffar Iqbal and Syed Nomanul Haq (editors), *God, Life, and the Cosmos: Christian and Islamic Perspectives*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, 125–152, which is revisited in William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2007, 109–132.

solution, which is to characterize the “organicity of the sacred and worldly” as *worldly* (“it is that organicity that I call ‘worldly’”) is simply illogical: it is akin to saying that $a + b = b$ (which is only possible when $a = \text{zero}$), or that $a \times b = b$ (which is only possible when $a = 1$). In fact, these equations are not an unfair representation of the trajectory of Dabashi’s argument which operates by the division of sacred and worldly, religious and secular, in such a manner that neither is allowed to impact upon the quality of the other—while rhetorically insisting, all the while, that he is doing otherwise.¹³⁴ His strict maintenance of the sacred/worldly binary is evident in the following passage where he defines the key term, “worldly imagination”—which for him lies at the heart of *adab*, or the cosmopolitan worldliness of literary humanism.

By “worldly imagination” I thus mean any act of creative imagination—be it narrative historiography or palace or mosque architecture—in which there is a detectable anthropocentricity in conscious or subconscious *contradistinction* to the theocentricity of the sacred. The centrality of the Qur’anic revelation in the Islamic sacred imagination should also function as the *contrapuntal* acid test of the worldly imagination. The creative imagination that casts the historic minutiae of being-in-the-world *against* the spectrum of the Qur’anic metanarrative must be, I contend, identified as “worldly.”¹³⁵

“Worldly imagination,” which is the elixir by which we are to transform our conceptualization of Islam/Islamic, is the domain of the “worldly sources of its creative imagination”¹³⁶ that stands in *contradistinction* to, *contrapuntal* to and *against* “the sacred certitude of its metaphysics.”¹³⁷ Putting aside the fact that, as we have seen, it is difficult to characterize the contentious metaphysics of historical and human Islam with the term “certitude,” let us ask where it is, according to Dabashi, that we are to find this domain of the cosmopolitan worldly imagination? Is it in Islam? No. Dabashi’s answer is that it is in the cosmopolitan literary humanism that is *adab*: a “poetic morality self-consciously irreducible to Qur’anic doctrines . . . in which one could live independently of any scholastic jurisprudence.”¹³⁸ Note here, first of all, the re-

¹³⁴ At times Dabashi makes statements that seem to be nullifying the operative binaries—such as the above-quoted, “Individuals operate not in two exclusionary spaces of the sacred or the worldly, but on the active continuum of fictive/rhetorical bipolarities that unite and negate both”—but having provided such diversions, he invariably lapses back into those binaries thereafter.

¹³⁵ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 39 (italics mine).

¹³⁶ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 159.

¹³⁷ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 159.

¹³⁸ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 55.

flexive separation, on the one side, of “poetic morality” from “Qur’anic doctrines,” and the reflexive collapsing, on the other side, of “Qur’anic doctrines” and “scholastic jurisprudence.” Poets, it would seem, have nothing to do with the Qur’an. But is it even *correct* to characterize the literary imagination of *adab* as “worldly”/non-Qur’anic when the very concept of “imagination” in the psychological and literary theory of the selfsame societies of *adab* to whom Dabashi directs our attention is that of “imagination” as the definitive prophetic faculty: *the faculty of the soul that apprehends the non-material other-worldly intelligibles and expresses them in this world*, or that re-orders the images of the material world in a way that expresses that which the material world does not express on the face of itself:

The prophet is distinguished from the others by a strong imaginative faculty. The central principle on which the Muslim philosophers found their explanation of the inner, psychological processes of technical revelation is that the imaginative faculty represents in the form of particular, sensible images and verbal modes the universal truth grasped by the prophet’s intellect . . . Figurization and symbolization is a function peculiar to the imaginative faculty.¹³⁹

In other words, in the societies of *adab*, the imagination cannot meaningfully be broken down into either worldly or other-worldly; the imagination is neither of the purely sensible nor of the purely intelligible: rather, it is the link between the worldly and the other-worldly—*it is both at once*. Now, according to Dabashi, the cosmopolitan worldly imagination is exemplified by Hāfiẓ: “there is a worldly disposition to and about Hafez (1326–1390), a material matter-of-factness, within which he dwells and from which he derives his faith.”¹⁴⁰ Perhaps we should not presume to make windows into Hāfiẓ’s soul to locate the source of his faith: what we do know for a fact is that Hāfiẓ was, in accordance with the abovementioned concept of the imagination, understood and received by the textual community of his poetry precisely as the “Tongue of the *Unseen*”; that is, of the *other-worldly*, the truths of which he apprehended and expressed through the imaginative re-presentation of the *materia* and *media* of this world—and that he was regarded, *in this way*, as a simulacrum of the Qur’ān. It is meaningless to speak of *adab* as the expression of “worldly sources of the imagination,” since what renders *adab adab* is the fact that it is the literary expression of a larger sensibility that imagines the this-worldly and the other-worldly, the Seen and the Unseen, as set upon

¹³⁹ Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 36

¹⁴⁰ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 21.

a cosmological communicative inter-course—and that this is one of the things that makes it *Islamic adab*. As Hāfiẓ said:

Bring wine! For last night the angel of the Unseen World
Gave me glad tidings that His Mercy emanates to everyone!¹⁴¹

And as Ghālib, the Hāfiẓ of Urdu, wrote five hundred years later of his personal experience of the business of writing poetry:

They come from the Unseen: these themes to the imagination;
Ghālib! The scratching of the pen is the sound of the angel.¹⁴²

The scratching, in the silence of the nineteenth-century Delhi night, of Ghālib’s worldly pen upon his worldly paper is the dis-coursing through his imagination of the other-worldly Unseen in the worldly language, themes and images of his poetry in the material and social, human and historical Seen world. How, in cognizance of this *self-conceptualization* of the Muslim *adib* (practitioner of *adab*), are we to make the *polar* distinction—“contra-distinction,” “contrapuntal,” “against”—between theocentric and anthropocentric that Dabashi demands of us? Why, even with the Qur’ān itself, Muslims were unable historically to decide with any certainty whether the divine speech was theocentric or anthropocentric: whether it is of species *qadīm—pre-eternal with/in God*; or of species *makhlūq*—that is, *created with/in the world!* When Dabashi says above, on the basis of relative quantification of Qur’ānic dependency, that “Islamic scholasticism is unimaginable without the active unfolding of the Qur’ānic memory in juridical and theological directions,” his implication is that Arabic and Persian (and Turkish and Urdu) literary humanism *is* somehow imaginable without the active unfolding of the Qur’ānic memory. My point is that Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu *adab* is neither imaginable, nor *meaningful* without the active imaginative unfolding of the Muslim engagement with the idea of Divine Revelation (exemplified in the Qur’ān) in the literary trajectories of self-exploration and self-expression. As Hossein Ziai so eloquently put it:

The poet serves as the link between the “unseen” realm—the cosmic, the divine, and the human. He is the “tongue of the unseen,” a veritable

¹⁴¹ *biyār bādah kih dūsham surūsh-i ‘ālam-i ghayb / navīd dād kih ‘āmm ast fayż-i rāḥmat-i ū*, Hāfiẓ, *Divān-e Hāfiẓ*, ghazal 397 (compare the translation of Ziai, “Hāfez, *Lisān al-Ghayb* of Persian Poetic Wisdom,” 460).

¹⁴² *ātē hayrī ghayb sē yih mažāmīn khayāl mēn / Ghālib ṣarīr-e khāmah navā-’ ē surūsh hay*, Ghālib, *Divān-i Ghālib*, 2:304.

prophet-like “messenger” figure whose words of wisdom affect everyone from king to pauper.”¹⁴³

At the end of the day, Dabashi’s project comes down to an attempt to assert the category of culture *over and against* the category of Islam.

To place the constitutional force of “Islam” in its cultural context and thus argue against the customary Islamicization of that cultural context, my principle argument has been that instead of an imaginary line called “Islam” encircling the multiple cultures it is supposed to embrace and define, it is those multiple cultures that have placed the Qur’anic and Muhammadan memories within themselves. My detecting a panorama of *worldly* sources of imagination in these cultures has been geared more towards a widening of our reading parameters of these cultures rather than positing a “secular” pole to the customary “sacred” basis of the Orientalist discourse on “Islamic societies.”¹⁴⁴

Dabashi thus presents us with two choices in a conceptual zero-sum game. Either Islam encircles culture, or culture encircles Islam: it is not conceivable for him that the two might productively be conceived of in terms other than encirclement and domination. And for him it is culture that is primary; and it is the privilege of *culture*—and not that of Islam—to be *worldly*.

... between the sacred certitude of its metaphysics and the worldly sources of its creative imagination, a culture locates precisely that interpretative space where a hermeneutics of alterity can detect and retrieve its unresolved problematic . . . [W]hat is particularly evident in the historical formation of the so-called Islamic culture, even if we so identify it, is the creative tension that has always existed between its theocentric and its anthropocentric forces, its centralizing proclivities and its decentering energies. To be a Muslim in the world is to retrieve that dialectic. To call that effervescent culture that is made by its active hermeneutics of alterity “Islamic” (or “non-Islamic” for that matter) is to deny that creative tension and thus to rob that culture of its most vital energy.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ “From this vista, wisdom of the unseen can only be communicated through the poetic medium, and the congenital poetic wisdom thus informs man of his response to his total environment, of the corporeal and of the spiritual, of the ethical and of the mundane. The ensuing perception of reality and of historical process is “constructed” (the Persian, *she’r sâkhan*) in a form, in an art-form, at times of a metaphysics, that *consciously* employs metaphor, symbol, myth, lore and legend,” Ziai, “Hafez, *Lisân al-Ghayb* of Persian Poetic Wisdom,” 469.

¹⁴⁴ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 158.

¹⁴⁵ Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 159.

Dabashi, then, locates the dialectic creativity and alterity of Muslims, *not* in Islam, but rather in “culture”—that is, *outside* that which he calls “Islamic”: he does not locate alterity *in* Islam, or culture *in* Islam. “Islam” is limited, limiting and un-creative: to call a culture “Islamic” is precisely “to deny its creative tension” and “to rob that culture of its most vital energy” (these statements sound so classically “Orientalist” in the definitive Said-ian sense that one wonders how Dabashi would have reacted had they been made by an Orientalist). This is nothing less than telling Muslims that if they want to be vital and effervescent and multiple, if they want to reclaim all those redeeming qualities of creativeness, humanism, cosmopolitanism, polyfocality and multifacetedness, they must “do” culture *despite Islam*—“Islam” will not do.¹⁴⁶

To my mind this stratagem of locating multiplicity and difference in *culture*, and unity and conformity in Islam is simply wrong. The practitioners of Islam and *adab* we considered in Chapter 1 did no such thing: when the community of readers of Hāfiẓ called him the “impress” of the Qur’ān, when the Great Mughal Jahāngīr inscribed his wine-cup with the statement of his succession to the Messenger of God, they were—as evidenced by their very language—not making statements that were cultural rather than Islamic, or that were cultural expressions of alterity rather than Islamic expressions of alterity: they were making statements that cannot be understood as meaningful other than *in terms of Islam* (as Islamic alterity, and Islamic normativity). Which takes us back to the question with which we began this book: how do we conceptualize *Islam*?



That “religion” has considerably unraveled as a concept of scholarly analysis—although *not* as a normative concept of (the religion of) modernity—and has become a category in search of an *alter ego* is becoming increasingly clear in the scholarly literature. While this crisis is still some way from reaching the stage, in Kuhn-ian terms, of forcing a total paradigm shift in academic discourse¹⁴⁷ (and, whatever partial effect it has had on academic discourse, it has scarcely affected popular, public and institutional discourse), scholars prepared to confront the inadequacy of the received orthodoxy are now making various attempts to rehabilitate the concept of religion by reconstituting

¹⁴⁶ One might say that Dabashi’s prescriptive project of *Being a Muslim in the World* is basically seeking to rehabilitate Muslims without rehabilitating Islam.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

it in new terms—such as the category of “post-secular religion,”¹⁴⁸ or of “religion as total social fact.” I invite the reader to substitute for the words “religion/religious” the words “Islam/Islamic” (I have inserted them in square brackets) in the following exposition by Hent de Vries from an essay entitled “Why Still Religion?” which introduces a state-of-the-art volume called *Religion: Beyond a Concept*:

So much is clear: beyond the modern definition of the concept, which has so often, and all too hastily, identified “religion” [Islam] with a “set of beliefs”—in any case with a mental state or series of states of consciousness, whose content and mode could be described by propositions that map ideas onto the world . . . an altogether different sense or set of senses of the term ought to be envisioned . . . a wide range of particulars, singular terms, signs, and marks (such as words and things, gestures and powers, sounds and silences, perceptions and affects, causes and effects) so as fully to appreciate and critically to evaluate the “total social fact” of its appearances, that is to say, of its modes and moods, its motifs and motivations . . . “religion” [Islam] is nothing more—and nothing less, than the “curvature of social space” in Levinas’ phrase . . . *we can start from any point of entry*, and each individually and singularly gives access to a different complexity of the same “total social fact” whose nature, logic or grammar it is strategically necessary to reconceive from the bottom up, starting from “things,” from some element or form, or even . . . from the philosophical consideration of how these might all constitute or call forth each other in a variety of revealing ways . . . Theorizing offers an invitation to realize the semantic, axiological, figurative, rhetorical, and pragmatic complexity of the “religious” [Islamic] phenomenon, the fact that it is made up of incalculable sets of phenomena, each characterized by different senses, sensibilities, affects, and effects, expressed in varying idioms, imagerys and dispositions, together with their irreducible materiality, their ever-more mediatized performances, and their now troubling then promising shades of authority and sovereignty, of powers and empowerments . . . When we take religious [Islamic] and ethical discourse as our subject matter, what we are examining . . . is precisely . . . the inference made by the people we are studying, the transition they make into discourse when they perceive something and the discursive exits they execute by acting intentionally in the world.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Mandair and Dressler, “Modernity, Religion-Making, and the Post-Secular.”

¹⁴⁹ Hent de Vries, “Why Still Religion?” in Hent de Vries (editor), *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 1–98, at 11, 13, 27, 44–45.

De Vries is proposing a re-conceptualization of religion as “a total social fact (*a fait social total*),” a term understood from its author, the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, to mean something like those phenomena “that bring into play the whole of society and all its institutions.”¹⁵⁰ In principle, this sounds like a very good idea but, in practice, if we are to conceptualize Islam as a “total social fact,” we are left with the task of identifying and understanding the *relations* between the “wide range of particulars, singular terms, signs, and marks (such as words and things, gestures and powers, sounds and silences, perceptions and affects, causes and effects),” as well as the “incalculable sets of phenomena, each characterized by different senses, sensibilities, affects, and effects, expressed in varying idioms, imageries and dispositions, together with their irreducible materiality, their ever-more mediatized performances, and their now troubling then promising shades of authority and sovereignty, of powers and empowerments,” indeed the very “curvature of social space” (by which Levinas meant “the relation between human beings”)¹⁵¹ of which that “total social fact” is comprised. If conceptualizing Islam as “a total social fact” means that “we can start from any point of entry, and each individually and singularly gives access to a different complexity of the same ‘total social fact’ whose nature, logic or grammar it is strategically necessary to reconceive from the bottom up, starting from ‘things,’ from some element or form, or even . . . from the philosophical consideration of how these might all constitute or call forth each other in a variety of revealing ways,” *this still leaves us with everything to do* by way of identifying *how* it is that the various points of entry, no matter how diverse or contradictory, *relate to each other* in a mutually communicable or *mutually meaningful* manner that allows for the one to be called forth and revealed by the other—to identify how it is that they are all *mutually implicated*.



One possible response is to say that this identifying of relationships is simply impossible. This is effectively what Robert Irwin, the editor of the volume of the *New Cambridge History of Islam* dedicated to *Islamic Cultures and Societies*, does when he invokes Wittgenstein’s famous (and famously problematic) theory of “family resemblances” to say that:

¹⁵⁰ Keith Hart, “Marcel Mauss: In Pursuit of the Whole,” *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 49 (2007) 1–13, at 10. In Mauss’ own words: “In these *total* social phenomena . . . all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic. In addition, the phenomena have their aesthetic aspect and they reveal morphological types,” Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1954, 1.

¹⁵¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, 291.

... “Islamic civilization” is a shorthand term for quite a different set of realities. Ludwig Wittgenstein, when he came in *Philosophical Investigations* to confront the problem of how to define “game,” denied that there was any single feature that games had in common. Instead “we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.” Wittgenstein went on to characterize these similarities as “family resemblances” and to argue that “games” formed a “family.” In the same way, there has not been one Islamic civilisation, but many different Islamic civilisations at various times and in various places. These Islamic civilisations have various features in common and constitute a “family.” Some of the things many of these civilisations shared derived from the religion that they had in common, but this was not always the case . . . Much of what we recognize as forming part of Islamic culture derived from local cultures and past non-Islamic histories, rather than being something that was imposed by Arab Muslim conquerors.¹⁵²

Irwin, it is worth noting, arrives at this very large theoretical statement through the specific example of an attempt to classify a single very small object (de Vries’s “any point of entry”), in this case an individual miniature painting: “Although *Humāy and Humāyūn in a garden* is unmistakably a work of Islamic art, it is extremely difficult to articulate why it is classified as such”¹⁵³ (for this miniature, see Chapter 6, where it will be discussed further). Irwin is here effectively substituting “Islams” (in the form of the plural, “Islamic civilizations”) for Wittgenstein’s “games”: on what basis do we identify as “Islam/Islamic” all those different things/games/Islamic civilizations that we place in this category? In many ways, we are back in territory covered with el-Zein’s argument for Islams-not-Islam—except that Irwin is not here abandoning the category of Islam outright. What Irwin is saying is that the category “Islam/Islamic” is constituted by things that resemble each other in various and different ways—rather than by things that share a common essence of Islam (which common essence he appears to identify with “religion”). He is saying further that none of those resemblances are present in all instances (since some of them derive from local or pre-Islamic cultures rather than from the imposition of Arab conquerors). Thus, it is not that these things

¹⁵² Robert Irwin, “Introduction,” in Robert Irwin (editor), *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 4, Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 1–16, at 3. For this famous passage, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1953, 31–34.

¹⁵³ Irwin, “Introduction,” 30.

all resemble the same single object; rather *each* of these things variously and differentially resembles *some* (but not necessarily all) other of these things, with the result that all objects are ultimately linked to all other objects either through direct or intermediary resemblances—but there is no common mooring. It is, therefore, analytically beyond us to tie these profusely differentiated resemblances together and identify a shared relationship that makes the category cohere—which is as good as saying that for analytical or conceptual purposes, it does *not* cohere. The problem here again is one of *meaningfulness*: if we cannot tie the relations together—even the resemblances, never mind the contradictions—then we cannot escape the nagging suspicion that, ultimately, the things are not tied together, and that the category “Islam/Islamic” is at best conventional, at mean arbitrary, and at worst just not very meaningful.¹⁵⁴ We are in some undefined and assuredly dubious place located somewhere between the analytical slippery slope and the conceptual thin end of the wedge. Effectively, Irwin’s resort to Wittgenstein’s “family resemblance” functions as a clever means by which to justify throwing up one’s hands and saying that there is no point trying to answer the *question* “What is Islam/ic?” since the Islamic is only a motley crew of similarities which we cannot tie together, nor tie to any single common point of similitude—that is to *Islam*. If there is a *common* semblance lurking, it is undetectable; if there is not, then we must muddle along with the category “Islamic” without actually ever really knowing what it *means* beyond that we call things Islamic because, in displaced and discrete ways, they look variously alike.

But does the concept of “family resemblance” work here at all? In the first instance, as we all know, there are family members who bear no resemblance to one another whatsoever, as well as unrelated persons who appear peas of the one pod. The mere fact of resemblance does not in fact establish *family*

¹⁵⁴ Wittgenstein’s “family resemblance” is, of course, a theory of ‘polythetic definition’ *avant la lettre*. “Polythetic classes are opposed to monothetic classes. A class is monothetic if and only if (A) each member of the class has all the characteristics defining the class as a whole, and (B) each of those characteristics is possessed by all those members. A class is polythetic if and only if (A) each member of the class has a large but unspecified number of a set of characteristics occurring in the class as a whole, (B) each of those characteristics is possessed by a large number of those members and (if fully polythetic) (C) no one of those characteristics is possessed by every member of the class,” Jan A. M. Snoek, “Defining Rituals,” in Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (editors), *Theorizing Rituals: Classical Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008, 3–14, at 4–5. Rodney Needham has pointed out that “family resemblances” makes “a class composed by sporadic resemblances,” adding that “a polythetic conception . . . still does not preclude the risk of leaving out of account some feature that is regarded indigenously as essential to the relationship,” Rodney Needham, “Polythetic Classification: Convergence and Consequences,” *Man*, n.s., 10 (1975) 349–369, at 352 and 363. For polythetic definitions of religion, see footnote 6, above.

resemblance and therefore connection by *family*—rather it establishes a family of resemblance, and therefore connection by *resemblance*; by the same token, the absence of resemblance does not establish disconnection by family, only disconnection by resemblance. In my view, the flaw in Irwin’s utilization of Wittgenstein’s theory of family resemblance to conceptualize Islam/ic is precisely his utilization of Wittgenstein’s theory of family resemblance to conceptualize Islam/ic. Simply, the exclusive focus on resemblance and similarity entirely misses the conceptual and analytic point. Rather, the question to be asked is a *historical* one (and, as such, one would think it might be asked in the *Cambridge History of Islam*). The question is *not* about resemblance; the question is whether different things can meaningfully cohere *without* resembling each other; not whether the *forms* of the various Islams *resemble* each other in a family way, but rather whether the *meanings* expressed by the various Islams, no matter how *different*, are in some way(s) or by some process(es) related *in their difference* to some *mutual* point or place or moment or mode of *production of meaning*. The problem at hand is related precisely to that dimension of the word “family” that Wittgenstein most neglected in his formulation: namely, *historical production*. Families are entities that are related by their production by a linked historical process of human intercourse. As Wittgenstein’s pre-eminent critic, Hans Sluga, points out, Wittgenstein’s analytical imprecision lay in his privileging of the concept of “resemblance” over the concept of “family” in the conceptual phrase “family resemblance”: “Human families . . . are related to each other not necessarily (or not only) by overlapping similarities, but by . . . causal relations.”¹⁵⁵ Citing “Wittgenstein’s resistance to historical (i.e., developmental and causal) explanation,” Sluga thus sharply insists that the idea of “family resemblance” is “insufficient for analyzing social and historical phenomena”¹⁵⁶ and, warns that “we cannot simply appropriate Wittgenstein’s concepts and methods and apply them unthinkingly to our own problems.”¹⁵⁷



Finally, it should here be noted that it is not merely Western analysts who, by their adoption of the religious-secular binary, have rendered themselves unable to conceptualize Islam in a coherent and meaningful manner: many modern Muslim actors and subjects have done the same. In a rare and perspicacious diagnosis of this under-recognized and understudied historical pre-

¹⁵⁵ Hans Sluga, *Wittgenstein*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 87–88.

¹⁵⁶ Sluga, *Wittgenstein*, 90.

¹⁵⁷ Sluga, *Wittgenstein*, 77.

dicament of modern Muslims, Abdulkader Tayob has argued that “the concepts of religion and the religious have played crucial roles in the production of modern Islam”:

The articulation of modern Islam in theory and practice depends to a large extent on this discursive formation around the notion of religion and the religious. Both religion and the religious are used in the Muslim tradition itself . . . the identification of the religious (*dini* or *islami*) within societies is implicated in a process of demarcation and exclusion. The *religious* and *Islamic* in modern Islam become clear and articulated in changing social and political contexts. The *religious*, in this case *Islamic*, comes into its own when the political, the legal and the social are specified . . . the religious sector was defined in terms of an increasingly growing “secular” sector. The role of the *ulama* (learned scholars of Islam) became clarified and also circumscribed within an emerging “religious” sector set off against the “secular” . . . The transformation of Islam in the modern period has relied much more than we have conceded to the usefulness and power of such concepts as religion (*din*) and the religious (*dini* or *islami*).¹⁵⁸

A religious sphere has been in the making . . . a demarcation between the religious sector as a moral discourse in public life and what are regarded as technocratic aspects of law, politics and education . . . While the “secular” domains were expanding, the religious domain was shaped as a moral watchdog over all areas, or a specialist organization teaching a body of knowledge called religion¹⁵⁹ . . . the religion-non-religious division is an underlying ground for the transformation of the modern organization of the religious . . . the religion-non-religious division provides a useful basis for reinventing Islam for modern social and political transformations.¹⁶⁰

In other words, it is not just the modern Western analyst who has difficulty conceptualizing historical Islam in terms other than those of the normative modern; also modern Muslims—in the respective degrees to which they are subjects (or subject-agents) of the regimes of the modern—have the same conceptual difficulty. To the extent to which they are constrained to think in

¹⁵⁸ Abdulkader Ismail Tayob, “Religion in Modern Islamic Thought and Practice,” in Timothy Fitzgerald (editor), *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations*, London: Equinox, 2007, 177–192, at 179–180.

¹⁵⁹ Tayob, “Religion in Modern Islamic Thought and Practice,” 186.

¹⁶⁰ Tayob, “Religion in Modern Islamic Thought and Practice,” 188.

terms of the religious-secular binary—or, for that matter, in terms of the legal-supremacist paradigm discussed earlier in the book—modern Muslims have the altogether greater existential problem of *living in terms of a conceptual incoherence with their past*. My point here is *not* that historical Islam is somehow true Islam and that modern Islam, to the extent that it has adopted the religious-secular binary (or the legal-supremacist brief), is somehow *not* Islam. Rather, the point is that any successful conceptualization of Islam must account for all these contrary claims as Islam, in spite of the degree to which modern Muslims are unable to do the same. I venture that a great deal of the existential tension in modern societies of Muslims arises precisely from the inability of modern Muslims to come to coherent terms with the norms of historical Islam—to come to terms with the *constitution and meaning of their past*—and from the incoherences of the various attempts to address this incoherence. This is a point to which we shall return in Chapter 6.

Our problems unsolved, let us try, then, to move forward by way of the following appeal from Reinhard Schulze:

The major problem is our tradition of viewing Islam exclusively as a religion. Any Islamic treatment of some aspect of reality immediately becomes a religious affair, but I am not at all certain what “religion” means in this context . . . The process of comprehending Islam today opens new horizons of interpretation. This process can only become productive when the classical cultural terminology is once and for all removed from our scholarly toolbox.¹⁶¹

Removed and replaced by what?

¹⁶¹ Reinhard Schulze, “The Ethnicization of Islamic Cultures in the Late Twentieth Century, or From Political Islam to Post-Islamism,” in Georg Stauth (editor), *Islam: Motor or Challenge of Modernity*, Hamburg: LIT, 1998, 187–198, at 197.

Culture, Meaning, Symbol System, Core and Nucleus, Whatever Muslims Say It Is, Discursive Tradition, Orthodoxy, Process

. . . the uncertainty of what, in particular circumstances, one may or can mean by “Islam” (alike, but not at all times together, a regulator of man’s relationship with a perceived one God, a salvation religion, an ontological system, a provider of personal or social law, and a symbol of communal identity).

—William R. Roff¹

A MAJOR CATEGORICAL CANDIDATE for the answer to the question *What is Islam?* is, of course, *culture*. The concept of “culture” that has come to pre-eminence is a *semiotic* one where culture is conceptualized as a complex of *meaning* expressed in symbols and signs. Probably the most influential theorist of a semiotic concept of culture has been the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, who, in a number of essays collected in 1973 in his classic *The Interpretation of Cultures*, elaborated a concept of “culture” as a system of symbols and meanings, or a domain of symbolic communication.

The concept of culture I espouse . . . is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore . . . an interpretive one in search of meaning.² . . . As interworked systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described³ . . . it denotes a historically transmitted pat-

¹ William R. Roff, “Islam Obscured? Some Reflections on Studies of Islam and Society in Southeast Asia,” *Archipel* 29 (1985) 7–34, at 20.

² Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

³ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 14.

tern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life . . . If Langer is right that “the concept of meaning, in all its varieties, is the dominant philosophical concept of our time,” that “sign, symbol, denotation, signification, communication . . . are our [intellectual] stock in trade” it is perhaps time that social anthropology, and particularly that part of it concerned with the study of religion, became aware of the fact.⁴

Geertz posited “religion” precisely “as a cultural system”;⁵ indeed, as Adam Kuper observed, he “elected religion to represent an epitome of culture.”⁶ Geertz’s notion of religion as a cultural system has been economically summarized as follows:

The cultural system of religion is composed of two complementary symbolic orders—an ethos (a people’s “moral and aesthetic style and mood”) and a worldview (“their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are”)—that mutually imply one another . . . Religions, in short, seek to harmonize a people’s conceptions of the real with their conceptions of the appropriate way to live.⁷

But there is, for Geertz, something else peculiar to the activity of religion as a cultural system: namely, that to harmonize a people’s conceptions of the real with their conceptions of the appropriate way to live, “‘the essence of religious action’ is to impose authority on a complex of symbols.”⁸ This cen-

⁴ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89; he is quoting Susanne K. Langer.

⁵ “Religion As a Cultural System” is the title of the fourth chapter of Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

⁶ Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 100 (italics mine).

⁷ William H. Sewell Jr., “Geertz, Cultural Systems, and History: From Synchrony to Transformation,” *Representations* 59 (1997) 35–55, at 39–40. In Geertz’s own words: “Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other,” *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 90.

⁸ Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account*, 100. Something similar as regards the centrality of “meaning” and “authority” to “Religion and World-Construction” was also emphasized about the same time as Geertz, albeit in a somewhat different way, by Peter L. Berger: “The socially constructed world is, above all, an ordering of experience. A meaningful order, or nomos, is imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals . . . [W]hen the nomos is taken for granted as appertaining to the ‘nature of things,’ understood cosmologically or anthropologically, it is endowed with a stability derived from more powerful sources than the historical efforts of human beings. It is at this point that religion enters significantly into our argument.

tral element of *authority* is one to which we shall have occasion to return later in this chapter.

While Geertz's intervention furnished scholars of numerous disciplines with something they longed for and rejoiced in, namely a "coherent conception of culture,"⁹ the fundamental deficiency in Geertz's conceptualization of culture/religion "as interworked systems of construable signs" is the curiously cavalier attitude that he took towards the construing of signs; that is, towards the very process of "the interpretation of cultures" that he identified as his project. The reader might have expected that, having identified culture/religion as "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms," Geertz would then move on to a stern admonition about the importance of paying rigorous attention to how particular communities read authoritatively their symbolic forms to produce culture/meaning/religion. Quite the opposite:

It is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something . . . Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.¹⁰

Now, while it may not be necessary or possible to know *everything*, it is surely necessary to know *something*—or at least to know as much as possible. What Geertz does here, in absolving the anthropologist of the task of mapping the "Continent of Meaning," is to absolve him(self) of responsibility to understand the *means* by which a community produces meaning/culture/religion. As his critic Talal Asad wrote, "He insists on the primacy of meaning without regard to the processes by which the meanings are constructed."¹¹ Instead, Geertz arrogates to the analyst/anthropologist/himself the self-constituted authority to interpret culture *ex cathedra academica* by gifted guesswork: as Adam Kuper noted of Geertz's now-legendary interpretation of the Balinese cockfight, "Geertz . . . does not specify the methods by which he identifies and reads the acted text of the cock-fight. Nor can he underwrite

⁹ Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established," Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Anchor Books, 1967, at 19 and 25.

¹⁰ The phrase is that of the eminent historian of France, Robert Darnton, cited in Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*, 119.

¹¹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 20.

¹¹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 43.

the claim that he is able to interpret the unspoken values of the Balinese. Geertz claims in effect to have penetrated the hidden depths of the Balinese psyche.”¹² Geertz’s analysis by privileged guesswork and charismatic impressionism is exemplified in his monograph, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, which is remarkable in that one is hard pressed to find in it any evidence that Geertz has actually taken into serious consideration a single written text from the intellectual tradition of either of these two countries.¹³ However, rather than dwell on Geertz’s cavalier attitude to the value of reading the discourses of Muslims, which he rarely cites or otherwise takes into meaningful account (an indifference to the self-statement of Muslims that renders much of what Geertz says about “Islam” moot), I would like to emphasize the crucial and, in my view, enduringly valuable element in his conceptualization of culture/religion: namely, *meaning*. Whatever and however differently Islam may *mean* to Muslims, to all Muslims Islam is *meaningful*. Thus, if unlike Geertz, I do not imagine that “to understand culture is to interpret its symbols” by virtuoso free association,¹⁴ but is rather to engage closely and attentively with the natives’ statements of self-conceptualization, their languages, lexicons, and logics of argumentation—that is, if, like John Bowen, “I am interested less in the overall cultural style than I am in the *din* . . . that emerges from the arguments,”¹⁵ or rather, if I am interested not so much in the *din* that emerges from the arguments as I am in the *Islam* of which the arguments are symptomatic—then the task of conceptualizing and understanding Islam becomes precisely to discover and

¹² Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account*, 108.

¹³ As Charles Lindholm observes, “Although Geertz’s well-known book *Islam Observed* (1968) tells the reader a great deal about what the author believes to be the respective worldviews of Muslims in Java and in Morocco, it says almost nothing about the doctrines, practices or principles of Islam itself. It is as if a book comparing the attitudes and cultural biases of the English and French were entitled *Christianity Observed*,” Charles Lindholm, “Kissing Cousins: Anthropologists on Islam,” in Hastings Donnan (editor), *Interpreting Islam*, London: Sage Publications, 2002, 110–129, at 111. An important anthropological attempt at a corrective of Geertz’s neglect of Islam as a meaningful element in the “religion of Java” is Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989. A particularly severe critique of Geertz is that of Daniel Varisco, who states: “*Islam Observed* is neither scientific nor ethnographic . . . following Max Weber, his self-acknowledged intellectual mentor, Geertz idealizes what he is in fact not an expert on,” Varisco, *Islam Obscured*, 9.

¹⁴ “Geertz . . . invites the reader to decipher the deeper meanings of *religion*—not to investigate how this invocation or rite or discipline works, to what that memory or desire or pain is attached, but how to interpret ‘religion as a cultural system,’ ” Talal Asad, “Response to Caton,” in David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (editors), *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, 210–216, at 213.

¹⁵ Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 8. “Overall cultural style” is a gesture towards the vocabulary of Geertz’s *Islam Observed*.

map its “Continent of Meaning” and to make sense of that continent as a *continent*: as a continuous, connected and contained—if topographically, climatically and demographically variegated—entity. It is to conceptualize how that continent is elaborated, articulated, constructed, conceived and experienced as an undulating *whole*, even when its parts present themselves in and as apparently distinct and disconnected local topographies. Thus, when we focus our study on local topographies (as we inevitably must), “our job,” to adapt and parse what William H. Sewell Jr. has said, “is to discern what the shapes and consistencies of local meanings actually are and to determine how, why, and to what extent they hang together” (as opposed to hang separately) “in spite of conflicts and resistance” as part of a larger “semiotic community”—that is, a community possessed by a shared “semiotic logic” which (as a logic) “must in some sense be coherent.”¹⁶ This is not a challenge that has been taken up by most of those in the field of Islamic studies who have otherwise found succour in Geertz’s concept of culture.



Perhaps the most sustained attempt to come to grips with conceptualizing Islam in terms of the semiotic idea of culture was made by Jacques Waardenburg in two (somewhat neglected) essays issued in 1974 and in 2007:

How to conceptualize that which is common to, and even unites, Muslim societies which are separated from one another in terms of time and space? Since it is Islam which, by Muslims themselves, is considered to be the unifying bond, it is our concept of Islam in Islamic studies which is at stake here. The search is, then, on a theoretical level, for a concept of Islam such that it indicates a common structure of all Muslim societies and communities, and that it can be made operational in the study of these societies so that their different aspects as well as their interrelations become more intelligible . . . One point of departure is the concept of . . . a signification system . . . Such a signification system will contain

¹⁶ Sewell argues “forcefully for the value of the concept of culture in its nonpluralizable sense” (i.e., “culture” not “cultures”) and suggests that “this conception actually implies only a quite minimal cultural coherence—one might call it a thin coherence. The fact that members of a semiotic community recognize a given set of symbolic oppositions does not determine what sort of statements or action they will construct on the basis of their semiotic competence.” See his superb essay: William H. Sewell Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture,” in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (editors), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, 35–61, at 59, 49, 58, and 50–51.

one or more basic views with regard to reality, views which have some permanency through historical and social variations, a permanency which guarantees the continuity of the given tradition. Such basic ties largely determine the orientations which exist within a given civilization or religion, as, for instance, the way in which in a given context the tension between the ideal and the real is articulated . . . we are concerned here only with “subjective meaning” as subject of investigation. Under subjective meaning is understood here the explicit or implicit meaning which a given fact or set of facts has for a given group or persons, or the specific meaning, significance, or relevance which is assigned by a group or person to a given fact or set of facts. Meaning in this sense implies some kind of communication between the people concerned . . . and the perception or assignment of such meaning nearly always leads to a certain action or at least behaviour on the part of the people involved . . . cultural life seems to imply certain codes of meaning built around what is held to be meaningful . . . Each society, as well as each group of societies considering themselves as belonging together, appears to have its own codes of meaning which are shared by the participants, and which perform a cultural function. Symbol systems, or signification systems, in a wider sense, imply such codes of meaning to which constant reference is made and which, in their turn, refer to what is considered to be of general validity, that is, general values, norms, and assumptions. That is to say, such systems seem to signify values, norms, and realities that, though being beyond empirical reality, are considered to have validity to the people. They signify something that is beyond society and its members, but not completely separated from them . . . The conceptualization of Islam as a religious signification system is a device by which such religious elements, signs, and symbols can be studied for their meaning-giving coherence and structure.¹⁷

The term “signification system” offers a descriptive framework to explore through factual data what Islam and its elements have meant to its various adherents. It allows us to capture its significance of providing a common bond between Muslims, while doing justice to varying interpretations and practices . . . The basic question is then to know how Muslims themselves interpret their diversity and unity.¹⁸

¹⁷ Jacques Waardenburg, “Islam studied as a symbol and signification system,” *Humaniora Islamica* 2 (1974) 267–285, at 267–274.

¹⁸ Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors: Islamic Meanings and Muslim Interpretations in the Perspective of the Study of Religion*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, 47–48.

We can study religions like Islam as interpretative systems that enable people to view and interpret reality, society, and life in a meaningful way . . . Studying Islam as an interpreted interpretation of reality, a signification system that is continuously interpreted, is like putting together pieces of a puzzle . . . If Islam interprets reality, it is itself continuously reinterpreted by its believers, adherents and sympathizers.¹⁹

The networks of signs that constitute Islam can be read, interpreted, and practiced in different ways in different Muslim societies, depending not only on the intentions of the interpreters, but also on contingent historical, infrastructural, and socio-political factors obtaining in these societies.²⁰

Engaging with Waardenburg's conceptualization of Islam as a "signification system" is made somewhat tricky by the fact that he does not define or otherwise specify the sense in which he is using many of his fundamental terms; not least, the crucial terms, "symbol," "sign," and "signification."²¹ Nonetheless, central to his formulation of Islam as "signification system" is, again, the element of *meaning* which he elaborates as (a) effected by a set of signs that together make up a signification system (b) constitutive of a group by virtue of being shared by it as norms and values (c) more or less permanent through time thus ensuring the continuity of the tradition of the group (d) constantly referred to by the group and communicated within it (e) productive of behaviour by the group. What we have here is basically the semiotic series of semantics, syntaxics and pragmatics mobilized to constitute a semiotic community.

The concept of Islam as a signification system necessarily turns on two things: first, the correct identification of the signs that comprise this signification system, and second, an accounting for how the signs are read and thus given meaning—or, as Waardenburg himself puts it, "What kinds of signs were significant to people and how did the people concerned read them in given contexts and situations?"²² He identifies these signs as follows.

The search here is for the meaning of those facts which to all Muslims have a symbolic or signifying function. Among such facts may be counted;

¹⁹ Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 34.

²⁰ Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 79.

²¹ In this regard he says only, "Our point of departure is the concept of symbol system as this concept is used in the social sciences," Waardenburg, "Islam Studied as a Symbol and Signification System," 268.

²² Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 82 note 60.

the Qur’ān and the person of the Prophet; specific texts or sayings from Qur’ān and *Hadīth*; social data such as the rituals and other prescriptions including a number of customs held to be “Islamic”; the self-consciousness of the *ummah* and the interpretations of Islam; certain words and deeds of certain religious leaders.²³

Waardenburg’s conceptualization of Islam as a signification system leads him—in a logic that bears a marked resemblance to the Sunni doctrine of *ijmā‘* (consensus)—to identify those signs/“facts” that, as he says, have a signifying function to *all* Muslims. However, many of the signs/facts that he identifies simply do not fulfill this criterion. Without doubt, we can lay claim to the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur’ān; one is hard-pressed to think of any religious leaders other than the Prophet Muhammad himself whose words and deeds are agreed upon by *all* Muslims as signifying Islam, or of very many (if any) interpretations of Islam agreed upon by *all* Muslims, or of a defined self-consciousness of the Muslim *ummah* beyond than that it is the Muslim *ummah* whatever exactly it is that this means. Also, the Hadith (and not necessarily the *same* Hadith) have certainly not been agreed upon by all Muslims as signifying Islam. For example, in the earliest centuries of Islam, a deep skepticism about the Hadith was evinced by the Mu’tazilah Rationalists (which prompted the Baghdadi scholar Ibn Qutaybah (828–885) to write a monograph defending the Hadith corpus entitled *A Book Explaining the Apparent Contradictions between Hadiths in Reply to the Opponents of the Hadith People*),²⁴ while in the last century, the movements in the Indian subcontinent known as the *ahl al-qur’ān* have sought to interpret the Qur’ān with little or no reference to Hadith at all.²⁵ As for “rituals, other prescriptions and customs held to be Islamic,” we have the Five Pillars, but even for those many Muslims for whom the adherence to the Pillars serves as the strongest and most meaningful ritual marker of identity, it is not clear how transposable a cache of meaning the Pillars comprise—that is to say, it is not clear to what extent the

²³ Waardenburg, “Islam Studied as a Symbol and Signification System,” 276–277.

²⁴ This is Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb ta’wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth fi al-radd ‘alā a’dā’ ahl al-ḥadīth wa al-jam‘ bayna al-akhbār allatī iddā‘ū ‘alay-hā al-tanāqūd wa al-ikhtilāf*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabbi, n.d. On the Mu’tazili stance on Hadith, see Josef van Ess, “Ein unbekanntes Fragment des Nazzām,” in Wilhelm Hoenerbach (editor), *Der Orient in der Forschung: Festschrift für Otto Spies*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967, 170–201; and Josef van Ess, “L’autorité de la tradition prophétique dans la théologie mu’tazilite,” in George Makdisi, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine (editors), *La notion d’autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982, 211–226.

²⁵ See the study by Ali Usman Qasmi, *Questioning the Authority of the Past: The Ahl al-Qur’ān Movements in the Punjab*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

fact of adherence to and performance of the Pillars helps us to understand other forms of meaningful activity of Muslims acting as Muslims. To be sure, I am not, in any way, suggesting that the Five Pillars are not of vital importance to the human and historical phenomenon of Islam, and thus to a coherent conceptualization of Islam—as a brief anecdote may help to convey. For several years, I taught an introductory undergraduate course at Harvard University entitled “The Vocabulary of Islam.” One day, late in the semester, my Muslim teaching assistant and I were emerging from the lecture theatre when he suddenly turned to me and said, “You know, Professor, I don’t envy you. I had initially thought that teaching an introductory course on Islam would be easy, but I have gradually begun to understand how difficult it is to convey to someone who has never pressed his forehead to the ground in *sajdah* what is Islam.” The profound truth of that simple remark has stayed with me. But, whereas the Prophet, Qur’ān, and Pillars might, in a fundamentalist significance system, suffice as the component elements for the purpose of “providing a common bond between Muslims,” they hardly do the job in helping us to understand “how Muslims themselves interpret their diversity and unity”: that is, in “providing a common bond between Muslims *while doing justice to varying interpretations and practices*”—especially if that diversity and varying interpretation is presented in terms of the awkward questions we have raised in the first part of this book.

Ultimately, Waardenburg’s concern to constitute Islam in terms of *ijmā‘* on “those facts which to all Muslims have a symbolic or signifying function” leads him, despite himself, to a somewhat fundamentalist conceptualization of Islam, as may be seen in the following passage:

I see Islam, in the first place, as an empirical historical and social reality linked to the presence of Muslims who made and maintain it. Furthermore, especially where the study of Islam as a religion is concerned, I see it as a set of norms (religion, morality, law) of what I call normative Islam. But third, I also see Islam as a tapestry of meanings and values by which people communicate with each other and that is spread over reality, giving it social meaning. Islam functions in this way not only as a law or doctrine but also as a “signification system” consisting of a number of elements that convey meaning as signs and symbols of things that may become “Islamic” discourse.²⁶

. . . a sharp distinction should be made between “normative” Islam and “practiced” Islam. Normative Islam consists of the proscriptions, norms,

²⁶ Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 30.

and values that are recognized as mandatory by the community. These are taken from the basic normative texts, mostly with what is held to be their authoritative interpretation by ‘*ulamā*’ and *fugahā*’. Practiced Islam comprises all those forms and movements, practices, and ideas that in fact, empirically, have existed in Muslim communities in different times and places that have locally been considered “Islamic” and consequently legitimate.²⁷

Waardenburg here distinguishes “normative Islam,” which he restricts to “religion, morality, law,” from what, in the one instance he calls “a tapestry of meanings and values by which people communicate with each other and that is spread over reality, giving it social meaning” and in the other instance he calls “practiced Islam.” The criterion on the basis of which Waardenburg makes his “sharp distinction” is *interpretive authority*: specifically, the interpretive authority of the *ulamā*’ and *fugahā*.²⁸ For Waardenburg, “normative” Islam is that universally “mandatory” body of proscriptions (one presumes, also prescriptions), norms and values (it is not clear what he means by the latter two terms) interpreted by the jurists from “normative texts” (which the earlier passage tells us are Qur’ān and Hadith). “Practiced Islam” is, by “sharp distinction,” not authoritatively interpreted by the ‘*ulamā*’ from normative texts, but is rather what local people just *do*: it is local, non-mandatory and *non-normative*. What we have here is effectively a re-roasting of the old anthropological chestnut of the Great Tradition and Little Traditions, but in a sort of caste system where the Great and universal is normative, and the Little and local is non-normative. What we also have here is the unstated operation of the paradigm of religion as constituted by scripture and priests: the jurists/‘*ulamā*/*fugahā* effectively here play the roles of “priests” in “religion,” and thus the jurists’ interpretation of “scripture=Qur’ān and Hadith” becomes, in Waardenburg’s logic, the normative *sine qua non* of Islam. All other Islam is thus, *per definitionem*, non-normative and, by the implication of Waardenburg’s logic, is not quite, or not yet, or not as meaningfully, or *Islamically*, Islam—and we find ourselves, by divers means, slipping once more into the legal-supremacist trap.²⁹

²⁷ Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 72.

²⁸ It is not clear if, for Waardenburg, the two groups, ‘*ulamā*’ and *fugahā*’ are identical or distinct—and if distinct, how so.

²⁹ While Waardenburg is not entirely clear on this point (in more than one place I have found a certain imprecision in his language that makes him difficult for me to engage with), he seems to be saying in the first quoted paragraph that those socially-prolific non-normative elements/signs/meanings in the “signification system” are not assuredly Islamic in the way that “normative Islam” is—rather they yet “may become “Islamic” discourse” but until then are apparently

Further, given the apparent centrality of *meaning* to Waardenburg's presentation of Islam as signification system, he (like Geertz) pays regrettably little attention to the processes by which meaning is produced; that is to say, he places little attention on the second half of the question, "What kinds of signs were significant to *people and how did the people concerned read them in given contexts and situations?*" Indeed, there is something fundamentally unclear (to me, at least) about the location of meaning in Waardenburg's concept of the "signification system." Is it the "facts" (signs) that comprise the signification system or the "meaning of those facts"? In other words, is the element of *meaning* to be understood as a part of the sign or as something consequent upon and issuing forth from the sign? When Waardenburg says that "the networks of signs that constitute Islam can be read, interpreted, and practiced in different ways in different Muslim societies, depending not only on the intentions of the interpreters, but also on contingent historical, infrastructural, and socio-political factors obtaining in these societies," he seems to be positing the sign as something constituted independently of and prior to the act of reading ("What kinds of signs were significant . . . and how did the people concerned read them?"). But the implication here is that, on its own, a sign has no meaning: it must be read by a person and *thus* made meaningful. Now, if a sign has no meaning without reading then how, if we are concerned with meaning, can we speak of "networks of signs that constitute Islam"? As a "network of signs" (in the sense that Waardenburg seems to be using the term) Islam is only meaningful *in potentia*: it is only as a network or, more accurately, as an *array of modes of reading* that Islam takes on *meaning*.³⁰

Further, a mode of reading does not only affect the *meaning* of a given and *prior* sign; rather the mode of reading, in the measure that it is *prior* to the sign/Qur'ān (as we have seen: in the case of philosophy, the priority is with Reason; in the case of Sufism, with Existence/Experience) can affect the *constitution* of the sign itself. Thus, while it is the case that for all of the modes of reading that are philosophy, Sufism, law and theology, the Qur'ān is indubitably the text sent down by God to His Prophet Muhammad, it is further and *differentially* the case that whereas for law and theology the Divine text is in

only potentially Islamic. Thus, while Islam is a signification system, not all of the system seems fully enfranchised to signify Islam: the full and final enfranchising authority lies, then, with the *'ulamā'* and *fūqahā'*.

³⁰ "Studying religion through discursive practices does not deny the importance of semantic and experiential qualities of religion, but it looks for those qualities in specific events of speaking, commenting and reflecting, rather than in the general qualities of symbols and meanings," Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 9.

essence and nature and being the highest (accessible) form of truth, for philosophy and Sufism the Qur'ān is of essence and nature and being *not* the highest (accessible) form of truth. For philosophy, the highest accessible form of truth is Reason, while for Sufism it is Existence/Experience—and the Qur'ān is constituted for philosophers and Sufis in and by these respective *prior* significatory realities. In other words, the practitioners of these modes of reading disagree not merely about the *meaning* of what they are reading/the Qur'ān/the sign, they disagree about *what* they are reading—that is, they disagree about what the Qur'ān/the sign *is*. The modes of reading do not merely produce meaning from the signs—from “those facts which to all Muslims have a symbolic or signifying function”—rather the modes of reading produce the *sign/fact* itself: the Qur'ān is constituted by philosophy and Sufism as a *different fact/sign* to the fact/sign that it is for law and theology. By focusing on pre-constituted signs, Waardenburg's conceptualization of Islam as a signification system fails adequately to come to terms with the constitutive power of *reading* as productive not merely of meaning, but of the signs themselves, as well as to come to terms with the agency of *readers* (especially readers other than *fuqahā'/ulamā'*) as makers of the signs and meanings of normative Islam.³¹



One wonders if an inherent flaw in the application of the idea of “cultural system” to Islam may not, in fact, be the very term “system” which tends to detract from, overpower and disable the element of human agency and induces a notion of Islam as a preconstituted—one might say, a made-and-received—entity, rather than one that is constantly in-the-making through the agency of the Muslim. The subtly debilitating effect of locating and defining Islam in impersonal (by which I mean: *other than the human agent*) terms such as “system” or “institution” may be detected in the following passage by that most sensitive of scholars of Islam, the sometime Anglican Bishop of Cairo, Kenneth Cragg:

³¹ This is despite Waardenburg's insistence that “it is a particular trait of the religious signifying process that it does not remain restricted to certain fixed symbols and signs which function as ‘cores’ or meaning. It has a typical radiation effect by which, in the light of one perceived meaning, a number of other facts are seen according to a new meaning pattern which determines a whole communal or personal perception of reality, and action derived therefrom . . . the study of any religion in view of understanding its ‘meaning’ basically requires . . . an attempt to reconstitute the signifying character of the religious data and to look at their radiation effect.” But it seems that what it produced by the “radiation effect” is not, for Waardenburg, normative Islam. See Waardenburg, “Islam studied as a symbol and signification system,” 271.

The great Arab-born monotheism of Asia and Africa is unique among faiths in being denoted by a term that is also a common noun . . . The name “Islam” could just as well be *islām*. The Arabic language has no capital letters and, therefore, no means of indicating the significant distinction between proper names and common nouns. It uses one term inclusively for both the simple action and the historical incorporation . . . There is the general and the specific; there is the idea and its definitive expression, the thing in itself and the things in its “institution.” Islam organizes *islām*, enshrines it and defines it. It makes Muslims of *muslims* . . . Islam is the thing and Muslims are the doers, both from a single root.³²

Cragg’s categorical statement, “Islam organizes *islām*, enshrines it and defines it. It makes Muslims of *muslims* . . . Islam is the thing and Muslims are the doers,” has the precise effect (which Cragg likely does not intend) of preempting the alternate conceptualization that it is not merely that Islam makes Muslims, but also that Muslims, by their *doing* (the thing), are simultaneously *making* the thing and *making themselves*—in other words, that it is the *islām* of *muslims/Muslims* that, as a historical and human process, produces Islam, articulates Islam, and gives Islam its content and meaning. Terms such as “institution” and “system” tend to overshadow human agency, and our use of such terms bends us away from thinking in terms of human agency. What we are deflected from seeing here is the existence of a *dialectic*: Islam makes Muslims and Muslims make (and continue to make) Islam.

But, on the other hand, even if it is literally correct to say, as Carl Ernst does, that “no one, however, has ever seen Christianity or Islam *do* anything. They are abstractions, not actors comparable to human beings,”³³ does this in fact mean that Islam, perceived by the individual Muslim as the vast and imposing received formation that confronts him or her from the day of his or her consciousness—the “Islam” that he or she is made aware is out there in the world as a edifice of truth, of right and wrong, of concept and value, of conduct and comportment, of community and personhood, and which he or she is brought up to *live with* and *live in* and *live as* and *live up to*—does the fact that we cannot *see* this Islam do anything mean that it actually does *nothing*? I would argue to the contrary: the Islam that Cragg calls the *historical incorporation* is a weighty presence that, like all great weights or colossal edi-

³² Cragg, *The House of Islam*, 5.

³³ Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, 51 (the italics are mine).

fices imposes itself even if it cannot act, that *impresses* itself upon the consciousness and perception of the person encountering it as a massively present structure and force: rather as mountains do. Thus, while I agree with Omid Safi when he says, “‘Islam’ as such teaches us nothing. The Prophet Muhammad does. Interpretive communities do. I would argue that God does through the text of the Qur’ān. In the case of texts, there are human beings who read them, interpret them, and expound their meanings,”³⁴ I also *disagree* with him when he says that. The *experiential* and *psychological* fact of the matter is *also* that every Muslim confronts in his or her life not merely human beings expounding the meaning of Islam, nor the memory of their beloved Prophet, nor a speaking God, but a massive *notion* called “Islam” that looms large in his or her consciousness and is present as a context of the Muslim’s life. That Islam-notion far exceeds the persons and voices and actions and agencies of the individual and collective human actors engaged with it—it exists in the consciousness and imaginary in and as a dimension that is far more than the sum of its parts and, as such, exercises agency and power by the “mere” fact of its massiveness. Indeed, those human actors who are seeking to expound its meaning are seeking precisely to harnesss the power of that Islam-notion and to identify their own meaning-making with *it*.



The question is how to conceptualize Islam in a manner that comprises both the larger system/structure/context/Islam-notion and the individual human agent. The scholar who made the most concerted effort in this direction was probably Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Smith’s was one of the earliest—and probably the most original and idiosyncratic—challenges to the category of “religion.” He famously stated that “the concepts religion and the religious . . . are not only unnecessary but also . . . are imprecise and liable to distort that which they are asked to represent”;³⁵ and argued for “putting aside the concept ‘religion,’” and “to work rather with two separate concepts,” namely “cumulative tradition,” which designates “man’s participation in an evolving context of observable actualities,” and “faith,” which designates man’s participation “in a something, not directly observable by historical scholarship”—while “the link between the two is the living person”:

³⁴ Omid Safi, “*The times they are a-changin’*—a Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender, Equality and Pluralism,” in Omid Safi (editor), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Oxford: OneWorld, 2003, 1–29, at 21.

³⁵ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 121, 112.

By faith, I mean personal faith . . . an inner religious experience or involvement of a particular person; the impingement on him of the transcendent, putative or real. By “cumulative tradition” I mean the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit, as it were, of the past religious life of the community in question: temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths, and so on; anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another, and that an historian can observe. It is my suggestion that by the use of these two notions it is possible to conceptualize and to describe anything that has ever happened in the religious history of mankind.³⁶

While Smith is “at pains to stress . . . that men’s faith lies beyond that sector of their religious life that can be imparted to an outsider for his inspection,” he does nonetheless go on to say that:

Faith can be expressed—more historically, faith has been expressed, observably—in words, both prose and poetry; in patterns of deeds, both ritual and morality; in art, in institutions, in law, in community, in character; and in still many other ways . . . A preliminary insistence must be that when any of these things is an expression of religious faith, then it cannot be fully understood except as an expression of religious faith.³⁷

In other words, *faith is expressed as and in cumulative tradition*:

Each person is presented with a cumulative tradition and grows up among other persons to whom that tradition is meaningful. From it and them, and out of the capacities of his own inner life and the circumstances of his outer life, he comes to a faith of his own. The tradition . . . and his fellows . . . nourish his faith and give it shape . . . If faith comprises a transcendent factor, does this mean that it is and must remain itself quite unknowable? I have insisted that it cannot be observed. Yet . . . it is in principle possible for men to become significantly aware of each other’s faith . . . by treating the observable terms of the traditions as clues to the understanding of a personal and living quality of the men whose faith they have expressed . . .³⁸ The observer, and indeed a man’s own fellows, do not see a person’s faith, but see the expressions of it.

³⁶ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 156–157.

³⁷ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 171.

³⁸ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 187–189.

These are many, and as they accumulate in history, they constitute what we have called the various religious traditions.³⁹

... The Islamic tradition that modern Muslims inherit, and that observers see, has been the handiwork of Muslims ... the historical construct, in continuous and continuing construction, of those who participate in it ... “To be a Muslim” means to participate in the mundane existence of the Muslim community and to have available the institutions, the literature and the ideas, the interpretations and the traditions that the community has produced ... to that extent “to be a Muslim” today in the fourteenth Muslim century means something different from being a Muslim in the first or the sixth ... Even if life did not change, this would be so. The fact is obvious enough in practice, but room must also be made for it in theory ... A religious tradition, then, is the historical construct, in continuous and continuing construction, of those who participate in it.⁴⁰

It is a failure of imagination on the part of the student, and a failure of either information or honesty on the part of a believer, not to recognize how different religiously was the situation in which the crucially important legal thinker al-Shafi'i grew up, from what has subsequently come to be known as Islamic. For everyone since that time who has used the term “Islam” to refer to a religious system has by it inevitably meant an Islam into the stream of whose historical development al-Shafi'i injected the ideas that he crystallized, with the fruitful consequences and reactions and institutional elaborations that emerged, as a result not only of his activities but of those of his contemporaries and successors; and *that* Islam al-Shafi'i himself did not know.⁴¹

Muslim men and women across the centuries have found themselves born into and surrounded by a world inherited from earlier generations of Muslims and stamped with an Islamic quality ... the content and framework for their living was that historical context or framework that we call Islamic. In every case, however, not only did they inherit this environment, willy-nilly; but, in turn, they also contributed to it, more often willy than nilly ... and the minuscule or large addendum that their living contributed to the on-going structure, and that they in turn be-

³⁹ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 171.

⁴⁰ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 164–165.

⁴¹ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 163.

queathed to generations following them, was not merely a mechanical reaction to that context but, they being human, was a small or large creative modification of it, fashioned in part by their choice, their will, their freedom.⁴²

Smith's "cumulative tradition" presents us with a means of conceiving of Islam as "the handiwork of Muslims," as a "historical construct, in continuous and continuing construction," that each Muslim has "inherited from earlier generations of Muslims" as "the content and framework for their living." The problem with Smith's conceptualization, however, is not so much the element of "cumulative tradition" as it is the element of *faith* of which "cumulative tradition" is *expressive*. The indispensability of "faith" to Smith's schema arises from the fact that whereas Smith calls for "putting aside the concept 'religion,'" in fact he does no such thing. We can see that throughout the above passages, Smith continues to use the word and concept "religion" as meaningful and as constitutive of phenomena—that is to say that he uses "religion" precisely as picking out particular things: "religious history," "religious tradition," "religious system," "religious faith." Smith is thus *not* "putting aside the concept 'religion'"; rather, he is accepting its constitutive and denotative validity, but is breaking it down or re-organizing it into two component parts: faith and cumulative tradition (by which he is seeking "to conceptualize and to describe anything that has ever happened in the *religious* history of mankind"). It is precisely because he is talking about *religion* that he identifies the *foundational* and *definitive* element in his conceptual compound to be *faith*—or, as he says, *religious faith*. And when he speaks of "cumulative tradition," he is really speaking of the expression of *religious faith* as *cumulative religious tradition*. In short, what Smith is actually doing is conceptualizing Islam as *religion*—but as religion re-configured as "religious faith + cumulative religious tradition" or as inscrutable religious faith expressed observably in cumulative religious tradition.

Since Islam/religion is pre-constituted here by "faith," this means that in order to identify the "cumulative tradition" of Islam (or to identify those elements in "cumulative tradition" that are actually *Islam*) we must be able to identify those elements in the cumulative tradition that are expressive of *faith* (as Smith says, "A preliminary insistence must be that when any of these things is an expression of *religious faith*, then it cannot be fully understood except as an expression of *religious faith*"). Now, Smith's definition of "faith"

⁴² Smith, "Islamic History as a Concept," 17.

as “an inner religious experience or involvement of a particular person; the impingement on him of the transcendent, putative or real” is a difficult one to pin down—especially when he tells us (some might say, somewhat obliquely) that faith cannot “be imparted to an outsider for his inspection” but can be expressed for observation. If faith cannot be imparted to an outsider, then how do we detect that what we observe in cumulative tradition is, in fact, “an expression of faith—of the impingement . . . of the transcendent putative or real”? I fear that if we follow Smith’s conception, when we outsiders come to identify expressions of faith as cumulative (religious) tradition, we will (since faith cannot be imparted to us) inevitably end up falling back on our particular preconceived notions of what (religious) faith is—and will thus turn to the usual suspects: piety, worship, prescriptive law, ritual, mysticism, *etcetera*. This, in turn, produces a second deleterious effect: which is that things such as the pure rationalism of the philosophers, or the wine-drinking of the Hāfiẓ-reciting aesthetes, which we do not habitually construe as or readily identify with “religious faith” will, naturally enough, not be identified by us as expressive of that “religious faith” in/as cumulative tradition—and *thus* will not be taken by us as *Islam/Islamic*. It is not self-evident to me that “faith” is the crucial component element in a person’s understanding himself or herself to be Muslim: certainly it does not seem fundamental in the example from my introductory anecdotes of the conversation between the two prospective fathers-in-law—the one an agnostic, the other an erratic formalist—who found mutual understanding and trust as *Muslims*; *that is, in terms of Islam*. Which brings to mind another example, that of the late uncle of a Turkish friend of mine who was a prodigious drinker of *raki*. However, he would, as a matter of principle, never consume as condiments with his drink any fruit mentioned in the Qur’ān, such as figs, olives, dates, or pomegranates because, as he (sincerely) said, “I am a Muslim.” Now, I suppose we could perfectly take the figs, olives, dates, and pomegranates to be “the impingement on him of the transcendent, putative or real,” but I am not sure that classifying this impingement as “faith” is the most productive means by which to understand his self-construction in terms of Islam.

In short, *faith* is too limited and limiting a criterion by which to underpin a conceptualization of human and historical Islam. Smith’s “justification by faith” does not allow for the possibility that there may be *more* to Islam as a human and historical phenomenon than can meaningfully be accounted or constituted and recognized in terms of *faith*. Smith’s equation of Islam as faith expressed in/as/with cumulative tradition is—in spite of the apparent expansiveness of its gesture at the agency of Muslims in the making of Islam—

owing to its pre-conception in terms of “religion,” insufficient to the capaciousness of the human and historical phenomenon at stake. It fails precisely to come to terms with the challenge that Smith himself identified:

“Islam” could perhaps fairly readily be understood if only it had not existed in such abundant actuality, at different times and in differing areas, in the minds and hearts of differing persons, in the institutions and forms of differing societies, in the evolving of differing stages.⁴³

Smith’s own response to the challenge of *diversity, change, and difference* for conceptualizing Islam is to reject “idealistic essentialism” and put forward the suggestion

for the historian to define Islam as an ideal not in heaven but in the minds of Muslims. “Islam,” then, becomes what Muslims conceive it to be. More accurately, the historian posits an Islam that has been the ideal (the series of ideals) that Muslims have held of Islam . . . it induces a careful attention to what has been going on not only overtly but in the Muslims’ head and heart.⁴⁴

So far (it seems), so good; but then Smith takes a very peculiar turn:

Yet again there are serious difficulties. It omits the imperfections that the believer does not choose to see . . . Further, the proposal will not serve the participant. An outsider defining the Muslims’ religion thus . . . must accordingly recognize that he is using the term “Islam” to refer to something other than what Muslims can understand by it. This is partly so in that for outsiders this “Islam” is—inescapably—multiform, human, and unstable . . . for an observer it must be, and for a Muslim it must not.⁴⁵

Smith is basically saying here that no universal definition of Islam is possible since one’s conceptualization of Islam is fundamentally contingent on whether one is an outside observer or a participant—one might say, according to whether one is a Muslim who “looks through” Islam or an infidel who “looks at” it. The implication here is that the Muslim conceptualizes in the grip of “faith” and without sufficient historical consciousness of “cumulative tradition,” whereas the outsider conceptualizes in the grip of “cumulative tra-

⁴³ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 145.

⁴⁴ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 151.

⁴⁵ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 151.

dition” without entering into “faith” (indeed, the above is one of the major examples from which Smith goes on to put forward his famous thesis of separation of “cumulative tradition” and “faith”). The result is that the faithless outsider sees Islam as “multiform, human, and unstable”—which, according to Smith, the Muslim *cannot* do (“something other than what Muslims *can understand* by it”)⁴⁶—and, by implication, the faithful Muslim sees Islam as uniform, divine and stable (on what basis it is that Smith insists upon the incapacity of Muslims to come to terms with their own historical diversity in terms of Islam or even *as Islam*, I do not know). All this rather leads one to fear that, at a coherent analytical conjunction, the twain—faithful Muslim and infidel scholar—shall never meet.⁴⁷

Elsewhere, Smith offers the following definitional statement of the conceptual issue:

“Islām” is used in at least three distinct ways to refer to three related but different things. First there is Islam; the self-commitment . . . of an individual Muslim: his own personal submission to God Secondly and thirdly there are the Platonic ideal and the empirical reality of the total system of Islam We may designate these three as Islam the active personal faith, Islam the religious system as transcendent ideal, and Islam the religious system as historical phenomenon . . . we may stress the point that the word “Islam” has three kinds of meaning, without postulating what the meaning in any case is. There is room for wide divergence as to what constitutes the personal piety of the individual Muslim; as to what the ideal of “true” Islam essentially is; as to what has been the actual quality of the Islam that has observably existed over now many centuries We also leave open the difficult and subtle question of the relation between the three.⁴⁸

The problem here is (at least) two-fold: first, where do we locate Islam, the “transcendent ideal” except in the observable statements of historical Muslims? And if Islam-the-transcendent-ideal is at variance with the “ac-

⁴⁶ Smith says elsewhere: “To a believing Muslim in the modern mood Islām if conceived of as a religious system tends to be conceived as fixed, as given by God: it does not change from one place or one generation to another, it has no history,” Smith, “The Historical Development in Islam of the Concept of Islam as an Historical Development,” 497.

⁴⁷ Smith did, however, establish an important intellectual and institutional conjunction at which Muslim and infidel continue to meet in scholarship and fellowship, namely the Institute for Islamic Studies at McGill University.

⁴⁸ Smith, “The Historical Development in Islam of the Concept of Islam as an Historical Development,” 485–486.

tual quality” of Islam—the “historical-phenomenon” (of which Islam—the self-commitment” is, in a sense, the smallest unit) then what does it mean to use the word “Islam”? While the relation between the three *different* things might well be “difficult and subtle,” for the term Islam to *mean* something, the three must somehow (even if subtly) cohere.



It may well be in ultimate despair of an analytical category of “Islam” that more than one scholar has put forward the idea “that Islam is simply what Muslims everywhere say it is,” or that “whatever people have believed to be Islam *is* Islam.” This view was expressed by the distinguished historian, Albert Hourani, with an arresting analogy:

“Islamic history,” within the modern context, can be defined in terms of the continuity of a tradition of high literate culture created around a core of religious doctrine and laws . . . The danger of . . . “Islamic history” . . . is that of seeing history in terms of an endless repetition of certain patterns of behaviour, derived from an unchanging system of beliefs. Is it possible to interpret modern history in specifically Islamic terms, without falling into the trap of believing in an unchanging essence of Islam defined in terms of its written formulations? We can find the beginning of an answer to this question in the ideas, by now becoming quite familiar, of social thinkers such as Clifford Geertz . . . a religion is . . . a system (if that is not too formal a word) of symbols: that is to say, images, objects, words or ceremonies which serve to express a certain conception of the universe . . . It is these symbols which give meaning to social action, and which therefore give a direction to it for they . . . contain within themselves some kind of principle by which acts can be regarded as worthy of praise or blame and so define the limits of what should or can be done. Such symbols should not therefore be interpreted in isolation, but in connection with the social actions which they express and direct. So, when they change, we need to ask whether this reveals some important social change . . . Even when they do not appear to have changed, we must still ask whether they express the same social reality as in the past. Here we can perhaps find an analogy with those tribal names which persist over centuries and whose persistence can, if we do not look beyond them, conceal from us the reality of change. When we read of Palestinian villages in the nineteenth century expressing their quarrels in terms of Qais and Yemen, or of two groups competing for land and water

in the Sudan in the eighteenth century and claiming descent from Umayyad and Abbasids, we should beware of ascribing a continuity which does not really exist. It follows from this that it would be dangerous to draw a sharp distinction between the “true” Islam and something else, or to give a privileged position to the formal statements of textbooks of law or theology. Seen in this perspective, whatever people have believed to be Islam *is* Islam.⁴⁹

Hourani is here trying to address the problem of characterizing temporal, geographic, social and cultural variety and change with the unitary term Islam/Islamic. His analogy suggests that, merely because Muslims identify with Islam (in the way that Palestinian villagers do with the pre-Islamic Arab lineage-groups of Qays and Yemen, or Sudanese factions with the early Islamic dynasties of the Umayyads and ‘Abbāsids), we should not assume that there is in fact a relationship between the act of identification and the putative object of identity. Rather, the relationship is with a “symbol” that can be invoked in diverse circumstances with no necessary continuity—that is to say, no necessary coherence—between the various instances of invocation. This would imply that symbol is only *nominally* the same in each instance, but is *substantively* different; since what gives it meaning is the local context and circumstance in which the symbol is invoked, “Such symbols should not therefore be interpreted in isolation, but in connection with the social actions which they express and direct.” But, at the same time, Hourani says that these symbols “which give meaning to social actions . . . contain within themselves some kind of principle by which acts can be regarded as worthy of praise or blame”: now, if the symbol contains a meaning-giving *principle*, then does this not suggest a stability or continuity to the substance of the symbol that goes beyond the name? The problem is a slippery one: we (including Hourani) seem to be in analytical need of retaining a stable “Islam” (conceived of as something other than “unchanging essence”) while letting go of it at the same time.

The notion that whatever Muslims have believed to be Islam *is* Islam is taken up in another vein by the historians, Bernard Lewis and Benjamin Braude:

And what do we mean by “Islam”? The term may mean the original Islam—what Muslims conceive as the Islamic revelation vouchsafed by God to the Prophet Muhammad and embodied in the Holy Book of the

⁴⁹ Albert Hourani, “Islamic History, Middle Eastern History, Modern History,” in Malcolm H. Kerr (editor), *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems*, Malibu: Undena Publications, 1980, 5–26, at 11–14.

Qur’ān. Or it may mean the subsequent development of that book by the work of jurists and theologians leading to the whole imposing corpus of Islamic law, theology, tradition, and practice. Or in yet another definition, the word Islam may be used as the counterpart not of Christianity, but of Christendom, in other words, the whole civilization which has grown up under the aegis of Islam and which embraces much that would be non-Islamic or even anti-Islamic in the first and second meanings of the term. In this sense, Islam means not what Muslims were supposed or required to believe and do in accordance with the precepts of their religion, but what, for better or for worse, they actually thought and did—in other words Islamic society and civilization as known to us from history and from present observation.⁵⁰

At the end of this passage, “Islam” is being applied “for better or for worse” to what Muslims “actually thought or did”—but without telling us *why*. The obvious response to this assertion is that if Muslims are not doing what they are supposed to be doing in order to be *Muslims*—if they are doing “much that would be non-Islamic or even anti-Islamic” according to “Islamic revelation vouchsafed by God to the Prophet Muhammad and embodied in the Holy Book of the *Qur’ān*” and according to “the whole imposing corpus of Islamic law, theology, tradition, and practice”—then what is the *connection* between what they were supposed or required to think and do and what they actually thought and did? If there is no connection, then how is it in any way *meaningful* to name what they are doing “Islam”? In the absence of a meaningful connection, Braude’s and Lewis’ use of the word “Islam” is entirely *nominal*—they have *named* the civilization Islamic, but without telling us what makes it so.

Talal Asad has criticized the idea “that Islam is the anthropologist’s label for a heterogeneous collection of items, each of which has been designated Islamic by informants” thus:

The idea that Islam is simply what Muslims everywhere say it is . . . will not do, if only because there are everywhere Muslims who say that what other people take to be Islam is not really Islam at all.⁵¹

For Asad, the idea that Islam is simply what Muslims everywhere say it is will not do because Muslims everywhere *disagree* about what Islam is. While Asad

⁵⁰ Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, “Introduction,” in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (editors), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society, Volume I: The Central Lands*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982, 3.

⁵¹ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, 1–2.

does not expressly say this, I take the implication here to be that if Islam is simply what Muslims everywhere say it is, and if Muslims disagree in what they say Islam is, then there is no coherent concept or entity “Islam,” but only a congeries of mutually-incoherent statements—which leads us back to the idea of islams-not-Islam (which, as we have seen in the treatment of el-Zein in Chapter 2, does not address the crucial fact that Muslims conceive of islams *as Islam*). Basically, to say that Islam is whatever-Muslims-say-it-is does not help us to understand how Muslims conceive of islams as Islam. The notion does serve as an encouragement to us to take a thorough survey and to duly note down all the answers that we encounter without prejudice or disenfranchisement—but without looking for what might make them cohere. As such, “whatever-Muslims-say-it-is” may be a serviceable *description*, but it is an inadequate *concept* in that it simply does not help us to understand any better; indeed, it proceeds on the basis that we cannot understand any better, since there is no-*thing* there—which means: no coherent thing there—to be understood.

The dilemma of *coherence* that is posed by the idea that Islam is whatever-Muslims-say-it-is was addressed most thoughtfully by Kenneth Cragg:

Who is the Muslim? That question is not as easy as it seems. We might answer, One who accepts Islam. But what, in turn, is Islam unless it be what Muslims acknowledge? Other religions have the same interdependence of definition between believers and belief, between the faithful and the faith. “Whatever the disciple is destined to discover in the Law was given to Moses on Sinai,” says a tradition of Judaism. It seems to validate anything, until we notice the safeguard in the word “disciple.” The conservative, fearing the dictum for its threatening liberties can still, for his comfort, disqualify from the “discipleship” the interpreter of whom he disapproves. But, in the end, Sinai is what Sinai means to those who belong at Sinai. The collective is the clue to the identity that makes it. *From this circularity there is no escape.* There has to be a parallel saying for Islam, though it is not traditional. “Islam is what Muslims hold it to be.” But they are Muslims because Islam holds them, and there will be continuing debate among them about who, and how, they properly are.⁵²

Cragg raises three fundamental points in this short passage: one is the unruly potentiality of the meanings that may be derived for “Islam”—“Whatever the disciple is destined to discover in the Law was given to Moses on Sinai.” The second is that of the apparently inescapable circularity that dogs the question

⁵² Cragg, *The House of Islam*, 4 (italics mine).

“What is Islam?”—does Islam make Muslims or do Muslims make Islam? *From this circularity there is no escape*: meaning, no conceptual or analytical escape. There is, however (and this is Cragg’s third point), a *practical* escape: the identification of a solution by which Muslims themselves check the “threatening liberties” of the potentiality of meaning, terminate the circularity, and thus define Islam. This is the act of social intervention by “the conservative,” who “fearing the dictum for its threatening liberties” seeks to “disqualify from the ‘discipleship’ the interpreter of whom he disapproves.” While Cragg does not say this explicitly, the intervention to disqualify is, of course, an intervention to establish *orthodoxy*—that is, the staking of a claim to the authority *exclusively* to answer the question “What is Islam”—which is, in turn, contingent upon (a) a *desire* to establish orthodoxy, and (b) the possession of the social *authority* to establish orthodoxy.



The scholar for whom the question of orthodoxy has been central in conceptualizing Islam is Talal Asad. In a brilliant and truly seminal lecture delivered at Georgetown University in 1986 and published under the title *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (probably the single most important intervention since Hodgson in regard to the conceptualization of Islam)⁵³ Asad sets out to put the conceptualization of Islam on quite different footing: as a *discursive tradition*.

Islam as the object of anthropological understanding should be approached as a discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it), and the production of appropriate knowledges.⁵⁴

. . . If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes

⁵³ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986. I think it no exaggeration to say that, for many scholars whose training in the study of Islam is philologically-, rather than anthropologically-grounded, Asad’s essay came as an eye-opener onto a domain of theoretical discourse of whose potential benefits they had been hitherto innocent. For a treatment of the wide influence of Asad’s essay, see Anjum, “Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors.” It is worth re-noting Asad’s statement of the fundamental conceptual problem cited in Chapter 1: “Anyone working on the anthropology of Islam will be aware that there is considerable diversity in the beliefs and practices of Muslims. The first problem is therefore one of organizing this diversity in terms of an adequate concept,” Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, 5.

⁵⁴ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, 7.

and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith . . . A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to *a past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and *a future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through *a present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions and social conditions). An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the past.

For the anthropologist of Islam, the proper theoretical beginning is therefore an instituted practice (set in a particular context, and having a particular history) into which Muslims are inducted *as* Muslims . . . A practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims—whether by an *'alim*, a *khatib*, a Sufi *shaykh* or an untutored parent. (It may be worth recalling here that etymologically “doctrine” means teaching, and that orthodox doctrine therefore denotes the correct process of teaching, as well as the correct statement of what is to be learned).

Orthodoxy is crucial to all Muslim traditions . . . orthodoxy is . . . a distinctive relationship—a relationship of power. Wherever Muslims have power to regulate, uphold, require or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy . . . Argument and conflict over the form and significance of practices are therefore a natural part of any Islamic tradition

. . . Reason and argument are necessarily involved in traditional practice . . . it should be the anthropologist's first task to describe and analyze the kinds of reasoning, and the reasons for arguing, that underlie Islamic traditional practices. It is here that the analyst may discover a central modality of power, and of the resistances it encounters . . . Power, and resistance, are thus intrinsic to the development and exercise of any traditional practice . . . The variety of traditional Islamic practices in different times, places, and populations indicates the different Islamic reasonings that different social and historical conditions can or cannot sustain.

. . . Although Islamic traditions are not homogenous, they aspire to coherence, in the way all discursive traditions do . . . An anthropology of Islam will therefore seek to understand the historical conditions

that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation—and the efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence.⁵⁵

Asad, who is in general concerned “to see religion (Islam in particular) as more *processual*,”⁵⁶ here harnesses the fundamental concepts of Michel Foucault (“discourse”)⁵⁷ and Alasdair MacIntyre (“tradition”)⁵⁸ to put forward the concept of Islam as “discursive tradition” wherein “a tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to *instruct* practitioners regarding the *correct* form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history” (italics mine). The defining characteristic of Asad’s Islam as “discursive tradition” is thus that it is *prescriptive*: Islam is oriented towards the prescription of correctness. It is for this reason that Asad places great—indeed, definitive—emphasis on *authority* as constituting Islam; “A practice is Islamic because it is *authorized* by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims” (one is, in fact, reminded here of Geertz: “‘the essence of religious action’ is to impose authority on a complex of symbols”).⁵⁹ This emphasis on the crucial role of authority for conceptualizing Islam serves as a corrective to the respective underdetermined conceptualizations of Islam which, Asad says, “have defined their scope too widely”⁶⁰: namely, “islams-not-Islam,” “Islam is whatever Muslims say it is,” and Geertz’s reading of cultural symbols by free association. It might be said that if for “other anthropologists” Islam is whatever Muslims say it is, for Asad it is whatever Muslims say it is *authoritatively*.

In my view, the subtle yet crucial problem with Asad’s conceptualization of Islam as a “discursive tradition” is precisely his locating the definitive quality of the discursive tradition in the dynamic of authoritative prescription of the correct: that is, in *orthodoxy*, which emerges irresistibly in his conceptu-

⁵⁵ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, 14–17.

⁵⁶ Scott and Asad, “The Trouble of Thinking: An Interview with Talal Asad,” 270 (italics mine).

⁵⁷ For a clear exposition of Foucault’s concept of “discourse,” see Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault*, London: Routledge, 2003, 53–66.

⁵⁸ “A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted,” Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, 12.

⁵⁹ Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account*, 100.

⁶⁰ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, 14.

alization as the “crucial” component in Islam. As Ovamir Anjum says, “He sees the basic function of tradition as establishing orthodoxy and orthopraxy in a given historical and material context.”⁶¹ Now, when Asad says, “Orthodoxy is . . . a distinctive relationship—a relationship of power . . . wherever Muslims have power to regulate, uphold, require or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy,” it is clear that, for him, orthodoxy is any truth-claim that Muslims in a given time and place institute, regulate and require through a process of exercise of power as being *authoritatively correct*—and thus as not welcoming or accommodative of contradictory claims, which are duly condemned, excluded, undermined and replaced.⁶² Thus, the “domain of orthodoxy” is the domain of Islam—“Orthodoxy is crucial to all Muslim traditions.” This is not to say that Islam is a homogenous entity—there is “argument and conflict over the form and significance of practices” and “the variety of traditional Islamic practices in different times, places, and populations indicates the different Islamic reasonings that different social and historical conditions can or cannot sustain.” Asad thus enjoins the anthropologist “to describe and analyze the kinds of reasoning, and the reasons for arguing, that underlie Islamic traditional practices,” to be especially alert to the key elements of “power and resistance” and “to understand the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation.” Now, it is one thing—and it is correct—to say that when we look at a particular society of Muslims and examine what it is that society presents as Islam/Islamic, it is incumbent upon us to consider the effect of the power relations in that society on its dominant constitution of Islam. However, it is another thing altogether—and it is, in my view, incorrect—to put forward a schema where the definitive purpose of the discursive tradition/Islam is the production of orthodoxy. In such a schema, Islamic reasoning emerges as a reasoning whose “reasons for arguing” are directed towards the authoritative prescription of exclusive truth—that is, orthodoxy.

“Orthodoxy” connotes, most intrinsically, the *prescription* and *restriction* of truth. While one can have pluralist orthodoxies—such as Islamic law, which accepts a delimited range of differing, or even contradictory, positions on the

⁶¹ Anjum, “Islam as a Discursive Tradition,” 661. See also Gabrielle Marranci, “Asad has limited the anthropology of Islam to an analysis of the power struggle between Muslims trying to maintain orthodoxy and the changing world challenging it,” Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, 42.

⁶² I do not agree with M. Brett Wilson’s interpretation that in Asad’s usage “orthodox” “simply means ‘conventional,’ ‘established,’ or ‘correct’ for a particular context,” M. Brett Wilson, “The Failure of Nomenclature: The Concept of “Orthodoxy” in the Study of Islam,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3 (2007) 169–194, at 185.

same legal question to be equally valid and true—the meaningfulness of the term “orthodoxy” is diminished as attitudes towards truth become less restrictive and prescriptive. Simply, the more pluralistic the attitude to truth, the less the term “orthodoxy” can help us in understanding that attitude to truth.⁶³ When the thrust of authority towards orthodoxy is posited as the definitive *processual dynamic* of the discursive tradition/Islam, then when we/Muslims “begin, as Muslims do” to conceptualize Islam/Islamic, we/Muslims (are obliged) to begin to think of *prescriptive authority*; and our/Muslim thinking of Islam in terms of *prescriptive authority* leads to our/Muslim thinking of Islam as *orthodoxy*—as the regulation or requirement of correct practices and the condemnation or exclusion of incorrect ones.

Attending to questions of the social and discursive locations of power helps us to identify what and how powerful Muslims, or what and how the structures and dynamics of power in a given society, prescribe as Islam in a given society—and can also help us to understand less powerful forms of Islam in that society (although, I do suggest that to achieve the latter we need to think beyond the limited and reactive dynamics of “resistance”). However, focusing on discursive tradition as orthodoxy leads us to constitute Islam in terms of another binary—namely, the binary of orthodoxy and un-orthodoxy/heterodoxy—and thus to fall into privileging powerful statements of Islam as “orthodox” and less powerful forms as “heterodox.” Also, focusing on prescriptive power leads us to think of the processual dynamics of Islam in terms of dynamics of coercion and restriction rather than dynamics of accommodation and expansion.

In sum, the effect of Asad’s conceptualization of Islam as a discursive tradition is to present Islam as a tradition which, for all of its variety, is constituted by an overriding concern to institute orthodoxy. Thus, authoritative, prescriptive and exclusivist discourse—including authoritative, prescriptive, and exclusivist reasoning—becomes, by definition, (more) Islam/ic than is non-authoritative, non-prescriptive, and non-exclusivist discourse/reasoning. It may be that I am reading Asad (too far) in a direction that he did not intend to go but—and this is important—it is an easy and seamless reading. It is telling, for example, that Brinkley Messick arrives inexorably at his above-mentioned conceptualization of core Islam=*shari‘ah*=total discourse found in

⁶³ Thus, while it might be argued that the non-concern of a given discursive tradition with prescribing a single authoritative truth *is* its orthodoxy—that it is the way in which that discursive tradition exercises its prescriptive/corrective power—this, in my view, is not a meaningful use of the term “orthodoxy.” Such a discursive tradition would be more accurately characterized as unconcerned with orthodoxy.

the texts of *shari‘ah* jurisprudence by explicit way of following Asad’s lead “to begin, as Muslims do.”⁶⁴

The effect of the orthodoxying premise is also seen in the following passage by another anthropologist, Reinhold Loeffler, who in his fieldwork in Iran, observed

an amazing variety of individual world views in a single, rather homogenous village . . . In this small village, Islam can take the form of a bland legalism or a consuming devotion to the good of others; an ideology legitimizing established status and power or a critical theology challenging the very status and power; a devotee quietism or fervent zealotism; a dynamic political activism or self-absorbed mysticism; a virtuoso religiosity or humble trust in God’s compassion; a rigid fundamentalism or reformist modernism; a ritualism steeped in folklore and magic or a scriptural purism.

Similarly, Islamic morality can be taken as requiring total commitment, permanent remembrance, and absolute inner purity or simply avoidance of harming others and punctilious performance of ritual. It can be taken as a justification for exploitation or the foundation for Islamic socialism. It can be taken as an uncompromising call to fight oppression or the sedative injunction to accept one’s lot contentedly and gratefully. It can be taken as a declaration that inequality among people is as natural as the inequality of the fingers of a hand or as the injunction that no man must be the servant of another . . . It can be taken to justify the subjugation of women or to assert their equality . . .

Confronted with such fundamental diversity, we have to discard any essentialist conception of Islam. Instead, Islam has to be understood as the totality of all symbolic forms considered Islamic by people regarding themselves as Muslims; i.e. an essentially unbounded complex of symbols and principles which on most any issue offer a wide range of possible, even opposing conceptions, meanings, attitudes and modes of thought, each formulated with sufficient fluidity to allow ever more spin-offs, elaborations and interpretations.

. . . But this material teaches us also not to overlook the subjectivity of the individual believer. For Muslims, theologian, scholar, or layman alike, God can speak but with one tongue. Consequently, there can only be only one true Islam, and that is usually the believer’s own. What we perceive as diversity, for the believer is a matter of right and wrong.

⁶⁴ See Messick, *The Calligraphic State*, 2–3.

Thus, while we acknowledge the various Islamic forms—African, Arabian, Indonesian; traditionalist, modernist, fundamentalist—as equally authentic expressions of Islam, we also have to acknowledge that in this sea of diversity each believer upholds his form as the only really true one.⁶⁵

Embedded in the above passage are several ideas that we have observed in the foregoing: the protean nature of symbols in the constitution of Islam, the consequent invalidity of constituting Islam by resort to an essence or ideal, the idea that Islam is whatever Muslims say it is, and the idea that the outside observer can see Islam as a plurality, but the Muslim insider cannot (“the twain shall never meet”) *because*, ultimately, for any given Muslim *only* that which *that* particular Muslim says is Islam *is Islam*. Muslims, in other words, are hopeless *orthodoxizers* whose individual *subjectivity* is constituted in the inability to recognize the validity of the individual subjectivity of other Muslims: “there can only be one true Islam, and that is usually the believer’s own.” At the end of all that variety, Loeffler thus collapses into Islam as orthodoxy: even if that orthodoxy consists in the orthodoxy of one. What this does not help us to understand is how it is that all these people, each insisting on his, or her, own monopoly in the economy of right and wrong, can (most of the time) live successfully side by side with each other in the same village—or town, or city, or country, or *dār al-islām*. It also posits an extremely limited capacity on the part of Muslims to conceptualize Islam—a capacity characterized by a fundamental *monovalence*: “for Muslims, theologian, scholar, or layman alike, God can speak but with one tongue.”

But, in the first chapter of this book I outlined the human and historical phenomenon of Islam characterized not by a definitive dynamic of a constraining thrust towards the formulation, regulation and requirement of exclusive truth (i.e., orthodoxy) and the concomitant resistance thereto, but by the conceptual and practical exploration, production, accommodation, appreciation and preservation of difference and contradiction; that is, of a historical reality in which orthodoxy—the insistence on adherence to singular truth on pain of sanction (often, legal sanction)—was not only *not* definitive of a prevalent Muslim notion of Islam, but where the prevalent Muslim notion of Islam was a discursive tendency that was simply not oriented to orthodoxy. I do not think, with regard to the ideas and behaviours described in the first part of this book, that the conceptualization of Islam as an orthodoxy-

⁶⁵ Reinhold Loeffler, *Islam in Practice: Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, 246–247.

oriented—one might say, an *orthodox-izing*—discursive tradition helps us to recognize or understand or conceptualize the fact of a human and historical Islam characterized by a complex and diverse range of “instituted practice[s] set in a particular context . . . into which Muslims are inducted as Muslims,” when those instituted practices into which Muslims are inducted as Muslims include, at the very center of the discursive tradition, Avicennan philosophy, Akbarian Sufism, Suhrawardian Illuminationism, Hāfiżian poetics, figural painting and wine-drinking. *That* Islam/discursive tradition is not orthodoxizing; it is not directed definitively towards correction and regulation and the authoritative establishment of an exclusive truth—that Islam/discursive tradition is quite something else. This conceptualization and practice of Islam is well summed up by the seventeenth-century Ottoman intellectual, Kātib Çelebī, in the book he entitled *The Balance of Truth in Choosing the Most True* (*Mızān-ül-haqq fī iḥtiyār-il-eħaqq*); a title that itself indicates that all contending positions contain a measure of truth. This leading Ottoman intellectual of his generation wrote:

It is a fact that when disputation and disagreement [*nizāc vü iħtilāf*] on any topic have once arisen among a people, it is not possible, after they have taken root, for that disputation and disagreement to be entirely eradicated . . . the intelligent man will not be so stupid as to hope to decide a dispute of such long standing.⁶⁶

The intelligent person contemplates and observes the wise purpose of disagreement [*iħtilāfin hikmeti*]. He finds that many benefits [*meħālih*] lie within it—and does not interfere in or attack anybody’s tenets or disposition [*meħreb*].⁶⁷

Kātib Çelebī expresses here a conceptualization of being Muslim that is thoroughly “un-orthodoxizing” in its way of going (*madħhab*) and disposition (*meħreb*)—that is to say, its primary purpose is not to prescribe and proscribe, but rather to *accommodate within reason* or, *within reason, to accommodate*. Kātib Çelebī’s attitude—and he is a typical representative type of seventeenth-century Ottoman gentleman (and, I would venture, of the educated gentleman of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex)—is that while it is of cardinal importance to debate and dispute,⁶⁸ and that while difference of

⁶⁶ The translation is that of Geoffrey Lewis, *Balance of Truth*, 28 and 41; for the original, see Kātib Çelebī, *Mızān-ül-haqq*, 15 and 28.

⁶⁷ Kātib Çelebī, *Mızān-ül-haqq*, 16 (compare the translation of Lewis, *Balance of Truth*, 28).

⁶⁸ He begins *The Balance of Truth* with the exordium “Praise be to God . . . so long as debates

opinion is a cardinal fact of human nature, there is absolutely no point in insisting on the prescription of single, authoritative, orthodox truths. But, as he duly acknowledged:

Other men are fools: they do not understand the wise purpose of disagreement [*ihtilāf hikmetini bilmaz*] and hold the absurd notion that all mankind ought to be of one *madhab* and one disposition [*meşreb*.⁶⁹

It is fairly clear from reading Kātib Çelebī that he did not suffer fools gladly—but he did suffer them.

And neither is it the case that this non-orthodoxizing conceptualization of Islam is confined to educated elite types like Kātib Çelebī. A socially prolific example of a non-prescriptive norm and value is *hayrat* or *perplexity* which is a concept that develops from the paradoxical Akbarian attempt “to see the One in the Many and the Many in the One, or rather to see the Many as One and the One as Many.”⁷⁰ Ibn ‘Arabi’s motto, “My knowledge of Him is my perplexity in Him”⁷¹ was taken up in the Sufi-philosophical discourse on the existential relationship between the Muslim and God, and became a normative theme worked through and expressed in the vernacular poetry of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. *Hayrat* is precisely an attempt to come to terms with the fact that God does *not*, as the orthodoxizers would have Muslims have it, “speak but with one tongue,” but rather that He expresses and manifests Himself in a prodigious *variety* of mutually-opposing statements and forms, the contemplation of which produces perplexity. Perplexity, which is, of course, precisely a condition of *non-resolution of truth*, is thus valorized as an appropriate and positive response for the Muslim to have to Divine Truth—that is, as a normative Islamic value (albeit a little-studied one). By its intellectual, literary, aesthetic and performative reiteration, *hayrat* rapidly became a *meaningful* existential condition positively valued, and actively participated in by Muslims throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex: the social recognition of its commonplace normativity is expressed in the adoption of the concept as *nom de plume* by figures such as the sixteenth-century Ottoman poet, Hayretī (d. 1535) and the nineteenth-century Indian intellectual Hayrat

[*mabāhit*] continue in the gatherings of the notables,” Kātib Çelebī, *Mizān-ül-Haqq*, 3 (compare the translation of Lewis, *Balance of Truth*, 21).

⁶⁹ Kātib Çelebī, *Mizān-ül-haqq*, 16 (compare the translation of Lewis, *Balance of Truth*, 28).

⁷⁰ Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 68. Izutsu translated *hayrah* as “mystical perplexity.”

⁷¹ ‘ilm-ī bi-hi *hayrat-ī fi-hi*, Ibn ‘Arabi, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah*, 4:140; cited by Nadeem, *A Critical Appreciation of Arabic Mystical Poetry*, 156 (compare the translation).

Dihlavī (1830–1899).⁷² The conceptualization and operation of *hayrat* (as well as evidence that the concept is still alive and kicking) is well-illustrated by the following passages translated from a poem by the contemporary Urdu poet Nāz Khayālavī (1947–2010) that has become particularly famous as a result of its having been taken up as a major item, in his performance repertoire, by the internationally celebrated *qawwāl* Nuṣrat Fatiḥ ‘Alī Khān (1948–1997), and thus prolifically circulated in audio recording and on the internet. The poem, composed in straightforward and colloquial Urdu, is addressed to God, and is entitled “You are a Puzzle-Lock” (*tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō*).

You are not and You are everywhere.

You are a puzzle-lock! . . .

If you are not of my thoughts, then how did I understand you are God?

You are a puzzle-lock!

I am perplexed [*hayrān*] at this business: what are you, who are you?

When you come to hand, you are an idol; when you do not come to
hand, you are God.

You are a puzzle-lock!

How can that which is encompassed by reason be limitless?

How can that which is understood be God?

You are a puzzle-lock! . . .

You do not hide; you do not come out in the open;

When you manifest yourself, you do not manifest yourself;

You do not settle the disputes of mosque and church;

What the real thing is, you do not tell . . .

You are a puzzle-lock!

Perplexity [*hayrat*] has dyed my heart in an amazing colour;

It has made of it a topsy-turvy picture;

I do not understand at all what this enigma is:

What is this game that you have been playing since before the
Beginning? . . .

Having given wing to the bird of freewill, in every direction you lay
traps in fate;

⁷² On him, see the memoir in ‘Abd-ul-Ḥaqq, *Chand ham-‘asr*, Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqī-yi Urdū, 1942, 13–20.

In every state-of-being you claim no-place-ness;
 Yet we hear your proclamation *We are closer!*⁷³
 This “Bad,” that “Good,” this “Hellfire,” that “Paradise,”
 Please tell: what is there in this play of opposites? . . .
 You have created everything that it might recognize you,
 And yet have kept Yourself hidden from all eyes . . .
 . . . The one who gave life to so many dead:
 With that Messiah you adorn the Cross . . .
 As for he who reaches the Station of Attraction and Intoxication,
 You have him accused with the *fatwā* of Unbelief:
 You yourself had Manṣur raised upon the gallows . . .
 If a Qays sets out in search of you,
 You turn him into the Majnūn of some Laylā . . .
 But if you yourself so desire, then you summon your beloved to the
 Throne
 And make him journey there in a single night.
 You are your own veil;
 You are a puzzle-lock! . . .

If I ask, “What is this?” You say in reply,
 “No-one may know this secret.”
 You are a puzzle-lock!

You are a world of perplexity [*hayrat*];
 You are puzzle-lock! . . .

On the road of Realization I find a tangle at every step . . .
 So many oppositions of nature on a single earth . . .
 You are a puzzle-lock!⁷⁴

⁷³ This is God’s declaration in regards to the human being, “We are closer to him than his jugular vein”; *wa nahnū aqrab ilay-hi min al-habl al-warid*, Qur’ān 50:16 Qāf.

⁷⁴ *tum hō bhi nahin̄ awr har jā hō / tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō / nahin̄ khayālōn̄ meī agar tū / to phir mayī kaysē samjhā tū khudā hay / ḥayrān̄ hūn̄ is bāt pē tum kawn̄ hō kyā hō / hāth ā’ō to but hāt nah ā’ō tō khudā hō / tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō / . . . ‘aql mēn̄ jō ghir gayā lā-intihā kyūnkar hō / jō samajh mēn̄ ā gayā phir voh khudā kyūnkar hō / tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō / . . . chhuptē nahī hō sāmnē ātē nahī hō tum / jalvā dikhā kē jalvā dikhātē nahī hō tum / dayr o haram kē jhagrē mitātē nahī hō tum / aşal bāt batātē nahī hō tum / . . . tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō / . . . dil pē ḥayrat nē ‘ajab rang jamā’ rakkhā hay / uljhī hu’i taşvīr banā rakkhā hay / kuch samaj nahin̄ ātā kih yih chakkār kyā hay / khel̄ kyā tum nē azal sē yih rachā rakkhā hay / . . . dē kē tadbir kī panchī kō urānē tū nē / dām taqdīr mēn̄ har simt bichhā rakkhā hay / . . . lā makānī kā ba-har hāl hay da’vā bhi tumhēn̄ / nahnu aqrab kā bhi payghām sunā rakkhā hay / yih burā’i voh bhalā’i yih jahannam voh bahisht / is ulaī phēr meī farmā’ō tō kyā rakkhā hay / . . . apnī piḥchān̄ kī khāṭir hī*

In his article “The Performance of Perplexity,” Amer Latif characterizes the experience of the poem thus: “The poem . . . emphasizes God’s enigmatic nature through the recurring phrase ‘You are a puzzle-lock.’ The effect of the repetition of the phrase is that it creates and builds on the emotional charge of amazement (*ta’ajjub*) and perplexity (*hayra*) in the listener . . . The repetition of the paradoxes surrounding God delineates the object of the poet’s search and of the audience’s worship as infinitely enigmatic. And yet, because the poet and the audience are present in the imaginal space of God’s presence, the object of their search remains accessible at the same time.”⁷⁵ “The paradoxes surrounding God,” which Latif also calls the “paradoxes of monotheism,” are something to which we shall return in Part 3. For the moment it suffices to note that paradoxes are forms of truth that it is very difficult to solve by orthodoxizing: as Richard Shweder has said, “Perhaps the truly astonishing thing about an astonishing world is that it is both affirmable *and* deniable.”⁷⁶ Here, the appropriate Muslim response to the Self-Expressive paradox of the One God is presented as the multivalent experiential condition of *hayrat*.

Now, my point is not to *deny* the presence of an orthodoxizing trajectory in Islamic history (which would be not only wrong, but somewhat absurd in view of my own work as a historian);⁷⁷ rather, I wish to caution against the analytical consequences of the tendency to over-emphasize prescription and orthodoxy in the conceptualization of Islam—a tendency hardly confined to Asad alone. Thus, at about the same time that Asad delivered his Georgetown

banāyā sab kō / sab ki nažrōn sē magar khwud kō chhpā rakkhā hay / tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō / . . . zindagī kitnē hī murdōn kō ‘atā kī jis nē / voh masīḥah bhī ṣalibōn pē sajā dētē hō / . . . jazb o mastī kī jō manzil pē pohōñchtā hay kō’i / khwud hī lagvātē hō phir kufr kē fatvē us par / khwud hī Mansūr kō sūli par charhā dētē hō / . . . justūjū le kē tumhāri joh chalē Qays kō’i / us kō Majnūn kīsī Laylā kā banā dētē ho / . . . khwud kō chhō tō sar-i ‘arsh par bulā kar maḥbūb / ēk hī rāt mēn mi’raj karā dētē hō / āp hī apnē pardah hō / tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō / . . . yih kyā hay agar pūchhūn tō kihtē hō javāban / is rāz sē hō sakṭā nahī kō’i shināsā / tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō / hayrat kī ēk dunyā hō / tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō . . . rāh-i taḥqiqā mēn har gām pē uljhān / . . . ēk hī khāk pē fitrat kē tażādāt kitnē / . . . tum ēk gōrakh dhandā hō. Not having had access to a print version of this poem, I have transcribed the text aurally from its performance in song by Nuṣrat Fatīḥ ‘Alī Khān. I have benefited from (and sometimes adopted) the translation by Amer Latif, “The Performance of Perplexity: A Sufi Approach to the Paradoxes of Monotheism,” *Muslim World* 97 (2007) 611–625, at 612–617 (the superb rendering of the key word *gōrakh dhandā* as “puzzle-lock” is Latif’s).

⁷⁵ Latif, “The Performance of Perplexity,” 622.

⁷⁶ Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures*, 23.

⁷⁷ See my forthcoming *The Problem of the Satanic Verses and the Formation of Islamic Orthodoxy* (and, in the meantime, Shahab Ahmed, “Ibn Taymiyyah and the Satanic Verses,” *Studia Islamica* 87 [1998] 67–124, especially the section entitled, “Ibn Taymiyyah, the Satanic Verses, and the Historical Constitution of Islamic Orthodoxy,” at 112–122).

lecture, the distinguished historian of the Malay archipelago, William Roff, published an essay entitled “Islam: One or Many?” in which he wrote:

All social action by Muslims, *acting as Muslims* (acceptors of the *shari'a*), is constrained by the objectively invariable prescriptions of “Islam,” known to the believer first from the Qur'an and secondly (if more questionably invariant) the *sunna*. These prescriptions . . . supply a major, sometimes determinative, part of the perceived objective conditions which direct or constrain action. Further, the common need to persuade, urge, teach, command, or reason with one's fellows in pursuit of proper Muslim action ensures the frequent iteration of prescription and its embodiment in argument and discourse . . . starting from prescription, Muslims actually do construct, evoke, deploy, and accept the “Islam” from which they act, see themselves as acting, or argue that action should follow.⁷⁸

Again, one is struck by the emphasis on *prescription* as the primary constitutive trajectory of Islam/Islamic. One wonders if this analytical reflex to prescription is a consequence of a larger cognitive habit of conceptualizing “religion” as a definitively “orthodoxizing” discourse, or perhaps of an even broader cognitive habit by which modern analysts (scholarly and non-) have historically become conditioned to regard the more restricted and less ambiguous—and thus the more *restricting*—necessarily as the more authentic.⁷⁹

It seems to me that the conceptualization of Islam as concerned crucially with authority and *hence* with orthodoxy arises in part from an insufficient interrogation of the category of authority, and of the modes of authority that have been historically operative in the Islamic discursive tradition. It appears that for Asad (also Geertz and Waardenburg and Roff), authority (in Islam, or in general) is *necessarily* prescriptive. But can we not conceive of other forms of authority that not only are *not* prescriptive, but that are actually at odds with prescriptive authority? I suggest that, to understand the discursive tradition of Islam, we must conceive not only of prescriptive authority, but of what I should like to call *explorative authority*—the *authority to explore*. Whereas the proponent of prescriptive authority views his authority as a license to prescribe to another, the bearer of explorative authority views his authority as a license to *explore* (by) himself. Exploration is precisely the business of setting out into the unknown, the uncertain, the unexperienced, the unsettled, the new—it is something that not everyone feels able to do (or that some-

⁷⁸ Roff, “Islamic Movements: One or Many?” 31–32.

⁷⁹ This latter argument against “the modern assault on ambiguity” was famously put forward by Donald N. Levine in 1985; see Donald N. Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

one feels that everyone else is able to do). In order to explore, one must take the view, first, that one has the authority to do so (that is, that one is not trespassing one's limits), and, second, that there is something of *value* or *meaning* to be obtained from the exploration—indeed, that *exploration itself is of value and meaning*.

It is this latter mode of authority that is operative in human and historical Islam in the search of meaning and value in the projects of philosophy and Sufism, and in the prolific range of exploratory discourses and practices—poetry, art, music, *etcetera*—that these projects informed. The Muslim philosophers arrogate to themselves the very highest degree of epistemological authority productive of the *most correct truth*—they regard themselves as Muslims *par excellence*, and regard their conception of Islam to be *Islam*; yet, they do not seek to *prescribe an orthodoxy*—a singular correct truth—on the basis of their authority; indeed, they regard their mode of authority as *above* (superior to) *the prescription of orthodoxy*. And while Sufism operates in society through the social organization of *tariqahs* which are the domain for the exercise and enactment of the spiritual authority of the *shaykhs* over their disciples, its ultimate conceptual and experiential goal is the *freeing* of the individual from the bonds of prescriptive authority/orthodoxy—as Rūmī said, “We have become gold and are delivered from the theory and practice of alchemy: we are God’s freedmen.” In the famous discussion of the meaning of the term *madhab* (“way of going,” “creed”) that concludes his *Balance of Action* (*Mizān al-‘amal*) al-Ghazzālī speaks of the *madhab* of the “perfect person [*kāmil*]” as comprising “that which a person believes within himself, drawing upon that which he has discovered by his own investigations”⁸⁰—that is, precisely a truth reached by *exploration*. Al-Ghazzālī adds bluntly that whereas “most people say that there is only one *madhab* [way of going] which is to be believed and proclaimed in teaching and guidance by all human beings howsoever their states may differ,”⁸¹ those few who know better are aware that *madhab* “varies and changes and is according to each person in the terms of that of which his understanding can bear.”⁸² The prolific literary discourses of Muslims, exemplified in the Hāfiẓ-ian register of self-expression and social communication, are concerned precisely with the personal and

⁸⁰ *mā ya’taqidu-hu al-insān fī nafsi-hi mim-mā inkashafa la-hu min al-naṣariyāt*, al-Ghazzālī, *Mizān al-‘amal* (edited by Sulaymān Dunyā), Cairo: Dār al-Mā’arif, 1964, 406.

⁸¹ *al-aktharūn yaqūlūna al-madhab wāhid huwa al-mu’taqad wa huwa alladhi yuntaq bi-hi ta’līman wa irshādan ma’ā kulli ādamī kayfa-mā ikhtalafa hālu-hu*, al-Ghazzālī, *Mizān al-‘amal*, 408.

⁸² *al-madhab . . . yataghayyar wa yakhtalif wa yakūn ma’ā kulli wāhid ‘alā ḥasab mā yaqtamilu-hu fahmu-hu*, al-Ghazzālī, *Mizān al-‘amal*, 407 (compare the translation of James Morris, “He Who Speaks Does Not Know . . . : Some Remarks by al-Ghazālī,” *Studies in Mystical Literature* 5 [1985] 1–20).

social *exploration* of the varieties, possibilities, complexities, and contradictions of the meaning of the Muslim human condition. Explorative discourse does not seek to *prescribe* a single meaning as *orthodox=Islam*; rather, it *explores a range of possible meanings as Islam* and is prepared to leave those meanings both unsettled and unsettling—to recall Hāfiẓ on God’s Judgement between him and the teetotaler: “God’s Will ’twixt the two? We shall see what is there.” Now, it is important to note that the two types of authority, prescriptive and explorative, are not mutually exclusive: a discourse or a society or an individual may (equally or unequally) be informed by both—but for that very reason, *both types of authority* must be accounted for in an account of that discourse or society or individual.

The conceptual and analytical deficiency in emphasizing orthodoxy as constitutive of Islam is that this has the effect of inducing or conditioning us to assess the Islam-ness of statements and practices in terms of their relation to orthodoxy: a statement or practice that is not directed at the authoritative establishment of correctness appears to us less (or not) Islamic. My point is that when Roff makes the acute observation and plea,

we may observe Muslims acting in ways for which they derive, and to which they give force and meaning through wide range of common, Islamically supplied (or enjoined) wellsprings of behaviour and response . . . It is, therefore, of primary importance to take seriously and on its own terms what Muslims, acting as Muslims, say, and not suppose what they say “really” signifies something else.⁸³

then: rather than proceed from the narrow scope of the Roff’s gloss of “Muslims, *acting as Muslims*” to mean “as constrained by the objectively invariable prescriptions of Islam,” our scope of “Islamically supplied force and meaning” should precisely encompass and be informed by this, admittedly complicating and contradictory, *exploratory* trajectory. Not to look to *exploration* for Islamic meaning is simply to fall short of fulfilling the important task “to take seriously and on its own terms what Muslims, acting as Muslims, say, and not suppose what they say ‘really’ signifies something else.” One might say that we would be failing to honour an admirable principle stated by Roff himself: “One cannot, in the interests of however desirable a patterned understanding, avoid the burden of complexity.”⁸⁴ In conceptualizing Islam we must certainly

⁸³ Roff, “Islamic Movements: One or Many?” 32–33.

⁸⁴ William R. Roff, “Islam Obscured?” 26. The interesting anthropological work on contemporary Islam by Asad’s leading students also limits itself to prescriptive discourses such as mosque sermons and the literature of women’s mosque-groups that are readily recognizable in terms of

attend to “the kinds of reasoning, and the reasons for arguing”: not just orthodoxizing reasoning *addressed at the production of unambiguous, bounded and binding meaning*, but explorative reasoning *addressed at the production of ambiguities, potentialities, and expanding meaning*. This explorative reasoning valorizes disagreement as a positive condition for the Muslim community (as reflected in Kātib Çelebi’s invocation of “the wise-purpose [*hikmet*] of disagreement”); and valorizes perplexity (*hayrat*) as a meaningful condition for the Muslim individual in engagement with Divine Truth.

The primary and dominant characteristic of the discursive tradition of human and historical Islam is *not* an orthodoxizing trajectory or impulse—that is, it is *not* the primary concern to discipline correctness and to institute an exclusive authoritative value or truth—and thus eludes Asad’s (and Roff’s) conceptualization of Islam.⁸⁵ To the contrary, the historical *bulk* of the

the parameters of the received category of religion/Islam (see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, and Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). My point is that our understanding of the discourses encompassed by the phenomenon ‘Islam’ needs to be expanded to accommodate the capacious historical reality of explorative discourses.

⁸⁵ I should note here that I regard as misplaced the proposal by SherAli Tareen to replace the category of “orthodoxy” with “normativity,” which Tareen defines as “the sets of ethical norms, theological commitments and patterns of embodied practices that are demanded from a particular community by a group of religious experts.” He continues, “I prefer the category of normativity over orthodoxy because it affords a greater fluidity and ambiguity in the location of religious authority among a set of competing claimants. The category of orthodoxy . . . creates the misimpression that one can in fact generate a set of names and addresses where the custodians of orthodoxy may be identified and marked as such. In the absence of dominant ecclesiastical authority in Islam, the heuristic value of the term ‘orthodoxy’ as an analytical category seems quite questionable.” SherAli Tareen, “Normativity, Heresy, and the Politics of Authenticity in South Asian Islam,” *Muslim World* 99 (2009) 521–552, at 526. I see no theoretical basis, nor historical evidence for the claim that the *normative* in historical Islam answers to the demands of religious experts (by whom Tareen seems to mean ‘*ulamā*’). In substituting “normativity” for “orthodoxy,” Tareen is failing to distinguish between two types of norms of different socio-political constitution: on the one hand, norms conceived of by their proponents as authoritatively prescriptive, and which those proponents are able to and seek to assert through legal sanction; and on the other, norms conceived of by their proponents as non-prescriptive and non-authoritative the assertion of which is not sought through legal sanction. It is important to distinguish in all societies, including Islamic societies, between these two differently constituted categories of norms: it is the first category of norms that is meaningfully characterized by the term “orthodoxy,” and the second by “normativity.” Those commitments and practices which are answerable to the demands of the ‘*ulamā*/‘religious experts’—who render Muslim subjects answerable to them (that is, to both norms and ‘*ulamā*’) by acting for/through the state by instruments of legal sanction—is *orthodoxy*, the social existence of which requires the authority to impose sanction on dissenters, but does not require “ecclesiastical authority” *per se*. The *normative* is produced by a much more diffuse set of social actors and discursive practices than those of the ‘*ulamā*/‘religious experts’ alone, and does not seek or enjoy the same authority of sanction.

normative discursive tradition of Muslims is non-prescriptive and non-orthodoxizing—instead, it is *explorative* of a multiplicity of truths and values—at least, this is how it forcefully appears when we do not pre-emptively *exclude* from that discursive tradition those texts that are, historically, the most read, recited and invoked texts of Muslim self-expression, exemplified in the literary canon of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. In the representative major themes of that canon that we looked at in Chapter 1—namely, love and wine—we noted how the basic expressive tenor of its discourse is the exploration of ambiguity, the celebration of ambivalence, the fascination of contradiction. This discourse is not governed by an authoritative urge to *fix the limitations of the correct*—rather it is informed by the urge to *explore and expand the dimensions of the meaningful*.

The historical preoccupation of Muslims with the exploration of the meaningful is evidenced by the prolific social practice of the Sufi *samā'*—literally, “audition”—those personal and collective exercises of Sufi existential experience that were performed at any time, but especially in public on Thursday evenings in *khāngāhs* and at Sufi shrines throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (the most well-known example of which, today, is the whirling of the dervishes of the order of Mawlānā Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī), and through which the Muslim sought direct, personal, subjective somatic *taste* (*dhawq*) of the Divine in a private domain of knowledge beyond the prescribed forms of correctness. The orthodoxy of *samā'* is one of the most chronically moot issues in Islamic history—as one sixteenth-century Ottoman scholar put it: “This issue has (by turns) been accepted and rejected by the horsemen of the field of science [*'ilm*] and gnosis [*irfān*] like a ball knocked back and forth with polo-sticks.”⁸⁶ To conceptualize the relationship of *samā'* to Islam in terms of the debate over its orthodoxy is to emphasize only one aspect of its human and historical *meaning* in relation to Islam. The exploratory adventure of the *samā'* was expounded by the philosopher, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī (1426–1502)—most famously, the author of the *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, a widely circulated work of ethics and practical philosophy in the tradition of Tūsī—who, in his commentary on al-Suhrawardī’s manifesto of his Philosophy of Illumination, *The Forms of the Light-and-Dark-Contrasting-Eye in The Temple of Lights* (*Shawākil al-hūr fī hayākil al-nūr*), described the *samā'* in Neo-Platonically-inflected Avicennan cosmological terms (the text in bold is al-Suhrawardī’s original, in regular type is al-Davvānī’s commentary):

⁸⁶ See the biographical entry on Muṣliḥ-ud-Dīn Lārī (d. 1572) in Nev'i-zādeh 'Atā'i, *Hadā'iq-ul-Haqā'iq fi Tekmilat-uş-Şaqā'iq* (reprint prepared by Abdulkadir Özcan), İstanbul: Çağrı Yayıncılık, 1989, 170–171.

Each one of the Celestial Spheres has a beloved from the Higher World—different from the beloved of the other Spheres—and this is due to the difference in the magnitude and direction of their movements. **The beloved is a dominating light, and is, by its light, the cause of that Sphere and its support**—meaning, it is the lord of its species, which species is the delimitation of that individual Sphere—**and is an intermediary between the Sphere and the First, the Exalted, [stemming] from Him, testifying to His glory and bestowing His blessings and lights.** So, from every illumination [*ishrāq*] there arises a movement related to this illumination—even if the Reality of this relation be unknown to us while we are in the World of Exile. In the same way as rapture [*tarab*] of the soul in us leads to dance and hand-clapping and with every movement, [the Sphere] acquires aptitude [*yasta‘iddu*] for another illumination, similarly does man acquire through *shari‘ah*-prescribed devotional movements aptitude for [receiving] holy illuminations. Indeed, the Realizers-of-Real-Truth [*muhaqqiqīn*] from the People of Divestment-Abstraction [*ahl al-tajrīd*] sometimes witness in their own souls a disquieting holy rapture [*tarab*] and begin thereby to move in dance and hand-clapping and rotating, and by this movement acquire aptitude for illumination by other lights, until this state departs them for some reason, as the experiences [*tajārib*] of the Sufi travellers confirms. This is the secret of the *samā‘* and is its source, which caused the Experiencers-of-the-Divine [*muta‘allihīn*] to put it in place. Indeed, some of the notables of this group have said that at times that which is opened [*yanfatiḥ*] to the wayfarer during one session of *samā‘* is not opened to him even in a forty-night vigil.⁸⁷

Again, my point is that *to conceptualize Islam first and foremost in terms of a concern to prescribe the correct is to lose sight of Islam as an undertaking to explore the meaningful*. As al-Davvānī here testifies, somatic and psychic rapture in *samā‘* served Muslims as a means by which to journey in exploration of the unknown—note the phrase: “that which is *opened* to the wayfarer”—in and beyond themselves from the World of Exile (i.e. the material world) towards the meanings of the Real-Truths of the Lights of the Celestial Spheres in ascension towards the Ultimate Real-Truth of the First, the Exalted, the Divine. The experience of Truth that opens up to the practitioner of *samā‘*—

⁸⁷ See Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammād b. Sa‘d al-Dīn As‘ad al-Šiddīqī al-Dawwānī, commentary on Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-Futūḥ Yahyā b. Habash b. Amīrak al-Suhrawardī, *Shawākil al-hūr fi sharh hayākil al-nūr* (edited by M. Abdul Haq and Muhammad Yousuf Kokan), Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1953, 157–158.

often characterized by the term *bast*, or “expansion”—can exceed even that which is attained through the privations of a forty-night vigil, which means that it far exceeds that which is experienced as a matter of routine in “*shari‘ah*-prescribed devotional movements” (i.e., the five daily prayers). As Rüzbihān Baqlī, the introduction to whose commentary on Qur’ān we cited earlier, informs us from experience:

From the first spiritual station to the last spiritual station, there are thousands and thousands of spiritual stations, and within each one of these spiritual stations there are thousands and thousands of *samā‘*s, and within each of the *samā‘*s thousands and thousands of attributes are forthcoming such as jealousy and reproach, separation and union, closeness and distance, burning and agitation, hunger and thirst, fear and hope, association and isolation, distraction and abandon, clarity and protection, servitude and Lordship.⁸⁸

It was precisely the expansive and exploratory nature of *samā‘* that troubled more cautious Sufi practitioners. Thus, “Qushayrī, one of the more conservative Sufi writers, saw in the enlightening experience of ‘expansion’ (*bast*) one of the greatest dangers, and ‘an insidious deception.’ This was arguably because of the potential of regarding this experience as extending beyond the confines and requirements of mainstream religion.”⁸⁹ To conceptualize *Islam* in terms which include and account for the historical and social centrality among Muslims of the physically, psychologically, emotionally, and cosmologically explorative practice of *samā‘*, we must similarly expand ourselves to think in terms *beyond orthodoxy*.

In doing so, we are doing no more than Muslims themselves did. At some point between his appointment in 1545 and his death 1574, the greatest Chief Jurisconsult of the Ottoman Empire, the Şeyh-ül-Islām Ebū-s-Su‘ūd, issued a *fatwā* in Ottoman Turkish (i.e. for a non-Arabic-reading audience beyond that of the *madrasah*-trained jurists) in response to the question: “Is it permissible [*halāl*] that the people of Unity (*ehl-i tevhīd*) from amongst the followers of the Sufi path carry out *zikr* [God-remembrance rituals] in mosques and

⁸⁸ Rüzbihān Baqlī, *Risālat al-quds va Risālah-‘i għal-ṭat al-sālikin* (edited by Javād Nūrbaksh), Tehran: Khāniqāh-i Ni‘mat-Allāhī, 1352 h [1933], 52, cited by Jean During, “Revelation and Spiritual Audition in Islam,” *World of Music* 24.3 (1982) 68–84, at 78 (compare the translation). On al-Dawwānī, see Reza Pourjavady, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran: Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Nayzārī and His Writings*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, 4–16; and Harun Anay, “Devvānī,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Islam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul: İSAM, 1988–2013, 9:257–261.

⁸⁹ Kenneth S. Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi samā‘: Listening and Altered States*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004, 189.

other gatherings by making rhythmic movement?" The phrase I am translating as "people of Unity" is *ehl-i tevhid* which, in the context of "followers of the Sufi path [*erbâb-i tarîqat*]," means "the adherents of *wahdat al-wujûd*/Unity of Being," since all Muslims are, of course people of Divine Oneness, *ehl-i tevhid*—and is thus a telling indication of how, in this Ottoman context, the Akbarian concept of Unity of Being/Unity of Being had staked a claim on the definition of the definitive Qur'anic concept of *tawhîd* / Divine Unicity. Ebü-s-Su'ûd's response to the inquiry is most instructive:

Knowledge of Divine Truth is a limitless ocean. The *Shari'ah* is its shore.
We are the people of the shore. The great Sufi masters are the divers in
that limitless ocean. We do not argue with them.⁹⁰

This is a most remarkable—and, indeed, profoundly moving—statement about the understanding of the place of Sufism among the Ottoman learned community. The characterization of Sufism by Ebü-s-Su'ûd, the highest authority on the *Shari'ah* in the Ottoman Empire, is exactly the characterization that a Sufi would make: Sufism seeks a truth more profound than the truth of the law, and it seeks that truth in the *exploration* of the vast depths of God's Ocean of Truth where the law, standing safely at the shore, does not venture. The chief jurist of the Ottoman Empire is saying quite simply that *Sufism constitutes a truth-space where the law should not go*: the policing of the domain of Real-Truth/*haqîqah* is not the business of the jurist's *shari'ah*.⁹¹

The problem is that the pre-conceptualization of Islam as "discursive tradition" = "orthodoxy" (like that of Islam as "law/*shari'ah*," or as "religion") has the effect of privileging as constitutive of Islam those texts and practices whose purpose it is to *prescribe*. This produces and is accompanied by the supporting pre-conceptualization (quite literally, the supporting *prejudice*) against recognizing the central place of non-prescriptive discourses—texts and practices *that do things other than to correct and prescribe*—in the normative constitution of human and historical Islam. Thus, while there is not too much wrong at face-value with Asad's call for us to identify Islam by beginning "as Muslims do, from a discursive tradition that includes and relates it-

⁹⁰ *Haqq te'âlânuy 'ilm-i şerifi bir deryâ-yı bi-pâyân dur. Şerî'at onun sâhilidür. Biz ehl-i sâhiliz. Meşâyih-i iżâm ol deryâ-yı bi-pâyânuy ǵavvâşlardur. Bizim onlarla bahşümüz yoqdur.* This is cited in Reşat Öngören, *Osmanlılar'da Tasavvuf: Anadoluda Sûfîler, Devlet ve Ulemâ* (XVI. Yüzyıl), İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2000, 384, from MS British Library, Or. 12933. The question to which the *fatwâ* is a response is: *erbâb-i tarîqat olan ehl-i tevhîd[in] mescidlerindeh ve sâ'ir da'vetlerindeh devrânlâ zikr-ullah etmeleri helâl olur mı?*

⁹¹ It should be noted that other *fatwâs* issued in the name of Ebü-s-Su'ûd take a less accommodating view; see Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire*.

self to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith"—at least, there is not too much wrong when this proposal is taken out of the context of his larger argument (although, again, one should note, rather than footnote, the important point that the authority of Hadith has historically not been accepted by all Muslims)—the problem with this agenda, when taken in the context of Asad's thesis, is that what he is effectively doing is calling for us to identify as the relevant and constitutive discursive tradition/Islam those texts and practices by which the practitioners of the discursive tradition engage with scripture to prescribe (or to resist) orthodoxy.⁹² By this criterion, those texts and practices whose engagement with Divine Revelation is not bound up in a dynamic of orthodoxy become *ipso facto* something less than "proper Muslim action" (to use Roff's phrase, above)—even when those texts and practices, as a matter of historical fact, were absolutely central to "the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it), and the production of appropriate knowledges." Asad's (and Roff's) prescriptive-authority-inflected conceptualization of discursive tradition/Islam effectively collapses the categories of "Islam" and "orthodoxy": one might say it functions superbly as a conceptualization of *orthodoxy* as discursive tradition, but not of *Islam* as discursive tradition.

This said, conceptualizing Islam as a discursive tradition is, nonetheless, a genuinely productive analytical strategy in that it helps to draw together the relationship between the production and communication of meaning, on the one side, and the constitution of a human community, on the other. As Roff noted, "If there is not an 'Islamic world,' perhaps at times not even a 'Muslim world,' there is an evident world of Muslims to whom Muslim discourse speaks."⁹³ The beneficial effects of the ideas of Asad and Roff may be very clearly detected (although they are not explicitly cited) in the formulation of John Obert Voll who, a little less than a decade later, drew also on the vocabularies of Immanuel Wallerstein ("world-system"),⁹⁴ William H. McNeill ("communication")⁹⁵ and Robert Wuthnow ("community of discourse")⁹⁶ in con-

⁹² In this way, Lukens-Bull misses half the point when he criticizes Asad for a perceived over-emphasis on scripture: "His depiction of Islamic discourses focuses too much on Qur'an and Hadith," Lukens-Bull, "Between Text and Practice," 10.

⁹³ Roff, "Islamic Movements: One or Many?" 48.

⁹⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and The Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, San Diego: Academic Press, 1974 (and subsequent volumes).

⁹⁵ William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

⁹⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment and European Socialism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

ceptualizing Islam as “a community of discourse” and “a discourse based world-system.”

This Dar al-Islam can be seen as a special example of a large-scale human group, using the definition of William H. McNeill: “what is common to all groups, surely, is a pattern of communication among members, sufficiently frequent and sufficiently standardized as to minimize surprises and maximize congruence between expectation and experience so far as encounters within the group itself are concerned.” This pattern of communication in the Islamic world . . . is built on the shared resources of the Islamic experience, which provide the basis for mutually intelligible discourse among all who identify themselves as Muslims with the Dar al-Islam. One can view the world of Islam as a large special type of “community of discourse,” in the sense in which that term is used by Robert Wuthnow: “discourse subsumes the written as well as the verbal, the formal as well as the informal, the gestural or ritual as well as the conceptual. It occurs, however, within communities in the broadest sense of the word: communities of competing producers, of interpreters and critics, of audiences and consumers, and of patrons and other significant actors who become the subjects of discourse itself. It is only in these concrete living and breathing communities that discourse becomes meaningful.” This pattern of communication or discourse provides the basis for identifying Dar al-Islam as a social system or human group possessing boundaries, structures, coherence, and rules of legitimization . . . the Muslims might be said to have created the “Islamic world-system,” identified by a distinctive set of socio-moral symbols for the definition of proper human relationships . . . A hemispheric community of discourse, or discourse based world-system.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Voll, “Islam as a Special World-System,” at 219–225; see also Voll, “Islam as a Community of Discourse and a World-System,” which he calls a “revision and gentle reconceptualization” of his earlier article. Voll puts forward this concept in trying to come to terms with the fact that “this Islamic entity was a vast network of interacting peoples and groups, with considerable diversity and yet some sufficiently common elements so that it is possible to speak of these diverse communities as being part of ‘the Islamic world.’ I hasten to add that the problem of understanding the ‘unity and diversity’ found within the Islamic world is a major and continuing one for scholars of Islam,” Voll, “Islam as a Special World-System,” 217. The prescient voice of Marshall Hodgson may also be heard projected in the above passage: “Islam . . . came closer than any other medieval society to establishing a common world order of social and even cultural standards,” Hodgson, “The Unity of Later Islamic History,” 176. Shortly before Voll, the historian Richard M. Eaton also spoke of “*Dâr al-Islâm* as a World System”: “in the post-thirteenth-century period, Muslims also constructed a world system . . . linking men and women through informal networks of scholars and saints, built upon shared understandings of how to see the world and

Conceptualizing Islam as “a community of discourse” has, as Voll points out from McNeill, the valuable consequence of emphasizing the element of *mutual intelligibility*—which, it is important to note, is not the same thing as mutual agreement. This, in turn, directs our focus to *communication*—that is, the production and conveyance of meaning—and thus (although Voll does not pursue this) to *language*. Muslims, however much they disagree, are people who somehow speak the same language: it is that mutual intelligibility of speaking the same language that makes their conversation, and thus their disagreement, coherently possible. I would suggest that to define a community of discourse requires us to *pay close attention less to things on which they agree, and more to the mutually intelligible language in which they are able both to agree—and to disagree meaningfully.*⁹⁸ The importance to a successful conceptualization of Islam of paying due attention to the attributes and functioning of language will be taken up in Part 3.

Looking to meaning, discourse, and language helps us to get away from the difficulties inherent in seeking to constitute Islam on the basis of a common core of ideas and practices. These difficulties arise even when the appeal to a common core is made in expansive terms, as in the following passage by Ahmet Karamustafa:

Islam *does* revolve around certain key ideas and practices, but it is imperative to catch the dynamic spirit in which these core ideas and practices are constantly negotiated by Muslims in concrete historical circumstances and not to reify them into a rigid formula that is at once ahistorical and idealistic. Many different formulae made up of the same

structure one’s relationship to it. Above all it was a world system constructed around a book, the Qur'an, and of humanity's attempt to respond to its message,” Richard M. Eaton, *Islamic History as World History*, Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1990, 43. For an analytical survey of the harnessing of the concepts of “world-system” and “network” to thinking about Islam, see Stefan Reichmuth, “‘Netzwerk’ und ‘Weltsystem’: Konzepte zur neuzeitlichen ‘Islamischen Welt’ und ihrer Transformation,” in Roman Loimeier (editor), *Die islamische Welt als Netzwerk: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Netzwerkansatzes im islamischen Kontext*, Würzburg: Ergon, 2000, 53–86.

⁹⁸ Stanley Fish has illustrated nicely the nature of a common language of disagreement when characterizing the writings of the radical literary critic who challenges fundamental tenets of his field: “The challenge he mounts to some of the conventions of literary study (the convention of the poem as a literary artifact, the convention of meaningfulness) would not even be recognized as a challenge if others of those conventions were not firmly in place and, for the time being at least, unquestioned. A wholesale challenge would be impossible because there would be no terms in which it could be made; that is, in order to be wholesale, it would have to be made in terms wholly outside the institution, but if that were the case it would be unintelligible,” Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, 354–355.

core stock of ideas and practices that we call Islam have always co-existed in Islamic history . . . “But what,” you will ask, “exactly is in that nucleus of ideas and practices lying at the center of this civilizational tradition?” Unfortunately, there is no pithy and definitive answer to this question. There have always been and continues to be a multiplicity of perspectives among Muslims even about what the core ideas and practices of Islam are. Minimally, however, we can assume a set of beliefs (a version each of monotheism, prophecy, genesis and eschatology) that underwrite a set of values (dignity of human life, individual and collective rights and duties, the necessity of ethical human conduct—in short, a comprehensive moral program) in turn reflected in a set of concrete human acts (ranging from the necessity of greeting others to acts of humility like prayer). It is also necessary to add, though this is an obvious point, that this nucleus is believed to be contained in the fundamental sources of Islam, the *Qur'an* and the exemplary life story of Mohammad. It is a version of this core that lies at the center of each and every one of the innumerable manifestations of the Islamic civilizational tradition in human history . . . Viewed as a civilizational project, Islam emerges as a dynamic, evolving phenomenon, one that cannot be fixed or reified in any way.⁹⁹

Karamustafa says here, first, that there *is* a nucleus or core of ideas and practices, but then qualifies this by saying that there is “a multiplicity of perspectives among Muslims even about what the core ideas and practices of Islam are.” Despite this multiplicity of perspectives, however, there is a minimal assumption that can be made about what the core/nucleus of Islam is: the core/nucleus of Islam is a set of beliefs (about monotheism, prophecy, genesis and eschatology), that underwrites a set of values or comprehensive moral program (dignity of human life, individual and collective rights and duties, the necessity of ethical human conduct) and is reflected in a concrete set of acts (such as prayer, or greeting others). There is also agreement among Muslims as to where that core or nucleus is “contained”: namely, in “the fundamental sources of Islam, the *Qur'an* and the exemplary life story of Mohammad.” Now, putting aside the (not unimportant) question of whether we (and, more importantly, Muslims) agree or disagree with the *items* that Karamustafa identifies as comprising the core, let us turn to parse his statement: “It is a version of this core that lies at the center of each and every one of the in-

⁹⁹ Karamustafa, “Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress,” 108–109.

numerable manifestations of the Islamic civilizational tradition in human history.” Given that, in Karamustafa’s own terms, the *manifestations* of the universal civilizational tradition are the various local cultures (of Islam), what we have here is a circumstance *not* where the universal core/nucleus of Islam is itself present in each local manifestation, but rather where only a *version* of the core is present—and, even then, is present not throughout the manifestation but only at the center. In other words, the minimal core/nucleus is not itself manifest in existence anywhere; what manifests is only a *negotiated* version which *claims* to represent the core/nucleus—and is a somewhat exiguous manifestation to boot (el-Zein would, surely, interpolate that what we have amply manifest here in local social and cultural reality is no universal Islam but only *versions*, only *islams*).

Another question is how—that is, by what criteria—do we recognize that each *manifestation* is, in fact, a manifestation of the core? Karamustafa seems to treat it as self-evident that any putative manifestation *is*, in fact, a manifestation of the core: that is to say that minority Alevis and Ismā‘ilīs—whom, it will be recalled, Arjomand characterized as “radical heterodox”—self-evidently cohere to Islam as much as do Sunnīs. But given that (as Asad pointed out), this is the very question over which the respective “Muslim” protagonists disagree (i.e., the question of orthodoxy and heresy, of “who is a Muslim?”), surely, what we have are only the innumerable respective *claims* by the “Muslim” authors of each negotiated manifestation that their particular manifestation does, in fact, manifest the putative core-Islam (or that it derives from the sources which contain this putative core). Karamustafa, however, does not identify Islam with or as or in a *claim* to derive from a common source or point of reference; he identifies it, in the first instance, with/as/in a *nucleus* (that is, a central body) of the “same core stock of ideas and practices” which is “negotiated” in a “dynamic spirit.” This conceptualization locates Islam in the core, not in the negotiation/manifestation. If, ultimately, what these local manifestations have in common is only that each makes a *different claim to derive from a common source or point of reference*, then should our attention, perhaps, not go towards the *processes* by which these claims are made and negotiated? Perhaps the collective integrity of the innumerable different negotiations over Islam is to be located in a means of conceptualizing *what it is that is shared by the different processes by which claims to Islam are made*.

There is also the view that the very historical multiplicity and complexity of the processes by which claims to Islam are made is what makes the apprehension of Islam impossible. Such would appear to be the position of Aaron Hughes:

I submit that either this academic discipline can bury its head in the sand of essentialism (e.g., “Islam is x,” “Islam is not-x”) or it can move beyond such confessionalism in favour of a much more rigorous, self-reflexive set of theoretical questions . . . I here argue that “Islam” is in many ways a construction that emerges out of a series of discourses manufactured in the western academy. This is certainly not to claim that Muslims do not exist, but that a world religion referred to collectively as “Islam” is not itself an innocent term that reflects a specific mode of being in the world, but is something that emerges at a particular historical moment in Europe’s thinking about itself . . . I suggest the multiple cultural, political, culinary, and artistic processes in which Islam has historically been embedded make it virtually impossible to extricate something that we often have no qualms extricating and labeling as “Islam,” “Islamic civilization,” or “the religion of Islam.” On the contrary, I suggest that it is precisely by such acts of extrication that we have invented “Islam,” by making “Islamic data” emerge from philological, philosophical, mystical, and theological systems that can be accessed in and through texts (the older the better) and divorced from bodies . . . Neither the Orientalist nor the apologist approach—to remove them briefly from their genealogical baggage let me re-label them here as the epistemological and the genetic—provides a proper understanding of something called Islam precisely because no such thing can exist.¹⁰⁰

Hughes is saying that it is impossible to define or identify Islam precisely because Islam’s historical “processes” are so multiple and complex that from them something called Islam cannot be “extricated.” This, however, is to miss the analytical and conceptual point, which is not to extricate a *thing* from the processes (which is, effectively, to conceptualize Islam as “essence” or “core and kernel”) but to understand the *processes* as Islam. Indeed, the analytical and conceptual task is to identify *how* they are the *same process*. This will be done in Part 3 of this book.

¹⁰⁰ Aaron W. Hughes, *Situating Islam: The Past and Future of an Academic Discipline*, London: Equinox, 2007, 3–4, and 54. As a postscriptum I must confess I should have been somewhat more heartened by Hughes’ manifesto of moving on to “a much more rigorous, self-reflexive set of theoretical questions” if these latter were not, for Hughes, exemplified in “the types of questions asked by Abraham Geiger” who, in 1835, asked “What has Mohammed taken from Judaism?” Hughes, *Situating Islam*, 13–24, 115. It is precisely the obsession with forms of this question and with the accompanying “What did Muhammad take from Christianity?” that focus on “what Islam took,” rather than on what Islam/Muslims *did* with what they took—especially what new things they made with what they took—that have hamstrung the labours and blinkered the visions of far too many in the Orientalist academy ever since.



The art historian, Wendy Shaw, has made the following remedial suggestion:

The first step . . . would be to revise the distinction between culture and religion and thereby reconsider the definition of Islam itself. Far from being circumscribed by doctrine, Islam, like any religion, informs and is informed by its own internal discourses, including both religious practice and cultural production. Thus, Islam is not constituted solely in its “fundaments” and their doctrinal interpretations, but is enacted within cultural products that can alter how those fundaments are understood within any given context.¹⁰¹

Shaw’s proposal (which she makes in the course of a penetrating critique of the prevailing conceptualizations of the qualifier “Islamic” in “Islamic art”), is that we “revise the distinction between culture and religion” such that we allow for a greater constitutive presence of culture in religion (or of religion in culture) and thereby redefine Islam. Thus we have religious “fundaments” and “cultural products,” which “cultural products can alter how those [religious] ‘fundaments’ are understood in any given context.” While this does expand the scope of Islam beyond (the fundaments of) “religion” and into “culture,” and allows for culturally-inflected or culturally-affected conceptualizations of the “fundaments”—it nonetheless retains the governing integrity of the categories “religion” and “culture” in such a way that the *fundamentalist* is always in a position to fall back upon the ideal notion of a culturally *un-inflected* or *un-affected* religion as the “true Islam” (we are back in the Hodgsonian dilemma of Islamic religion and Islamicate culture). In my view, in light of the foregoing survey of failed attempts to apply the categories of “religion” and “culture” relative to Islam, if we are to successfully conceptualize the human and historical phenomenon of Islam in a way that maps onto the historical reality we need not so much to “*revise* the distinction between religion and culture” as to reconsider our use of these categories altogether—we need to *move beyond* the distinction between “religion” and “culture” to constitute the relevant category: that of *Islam*.

But: how? Reinhard Schulze has made the following observation:

It is just as impossible to give an exact answer to the question “what is Islam, or Islamism?” as it is to the questions “what is culture?,” “what is

¹⁰¹ Wendy M. K. Shaw, “The Islam in Islamic Art History,” at 32.

society?" or "what is identity?" . . . By recognizing this character, the old essentialist phrase "Islam is . . ." will be replaced by "a social or cultural reality is Islamically negotiated by . . . in form of . . ."¹⁰² The verb [*sic*] "islamically" is what makes it so difficult for us to understand how the process of dealing with social or cultural realities is undertaken in the Muslim world today. Our own assumptions regarding comprehension are so strongly imprinted with essentialist patterns of interpretation that it becomes difficult for us to retrace what takes place in a deliberation that is ethnified to such an extent.¹⁰³

"Ethnified" may not be the most elegant word, but perhaps its very awkwardness conveys a basic insight as to the problem at hand: there is something *peculiar and particular to Islamic deliberation that renders it Islamic*. We need to identify what that is. While Schulze does not go any further with his insight, perhaps, in light of what we have already seen, we can take this point forward. The verbs "negotiate" and "deliberate" (which we have seen recurring, with variable degrees of profit, in several of the authors discussed above) point to three things: that Islam is a *process*, that it is a process of human discursive and social activity, and that the discourse is characterized by a multiplicity of voices. But even if Islam is not an essence, but a *process*, in order to know what *Islam is*, we still need to be able to *conceptualize the process* that is Islam. And if we are going to use the adverb "Islamically"¹⁰⁴ (or the adjective "Islamic") *meaningfully* to qualify verbs such as "negotiate" and "deliberate"—we need to conceptualize this process in a manner that locates *what it is that makes this specific negotiation or deliberation Islamic*. We need to attend to the predication, predicaments and processes of reading, reasoning, and acting; we need to attend to the structures and modes and media of truth-making and meaning-making—we need to attend, in both a broad and a close sense, to hermeneutical engagement. That is a good place whence to embark.

¹⁰² The dots of ellipsis in the sentence "By recognizing this character, the old essentialist phrase 'Islam is . . .' will be replaced by 'a social or cultural reality is Islamically negotiated by . . . in form of . . .,'" are in Schulze's original text, and do not indicate text omitted by me in quoting from the original.

¹⁰³ Schulze, "The Ethnicization of Islamic Cultures," 197.

¹⁰⁴ Schulze terms "islamically" a verb, which it is not.

PART THREE

Re-Conceptualizations

Hermeneutical Engagement, Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, Meaning-Making for the Self, Spatiality of Revelation, Hierarchy, Exteriority- Interiority, Public and Private, Language and Vocabulary, Ambivalence and Ambiguity, Metaphor and Paradox

They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.

—Heraclitus¹

Analysis is the distinguishing of things that exist sound and true in combination—but that have become confused in the mind—in such a way that each of them is rendered separate from the others in its potential and in its definition; or in such a way that each of them comes to indicate the existence of the other, so that when one considers the state of one of them, one is transported from the one to the other.

—Ibn Sīnā/Avicenna²

NEARLY SEVENTY YEARS AGO, Giorgio Levi Della Vida made a deceptively simple yet profound statement: “Islam . . . is so complex that it cannot be made to coincide with anything other than itself.”³ We have seen in the

¹ Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 65.

² *inna al-tahlil tamyiz ashyā’ saḥħa wujūdū-hā fī al-mujtama‘ wa lākinna-hā mukhtalaṭah ‘inda al-‘aql fa-yuḍsalu ba‘du-hā ‘an ba‘dīn bi-quwwati-hi wa bi-haddi-hi aw yakūnu ba‘du-hā yadullu ‘alā wujūd al-ākhar fa-idhā ta‘ammala hāla ba‘di-hā intaqala min-hu ilā al-ākhar*, Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’: al-ṭabi‘iyyāt*, 1. *al-samā‘ al-ṭabi‘i* (edited by Sa‘id Zāyid), Cairo: al-Hay‘ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1983, 142 (compare the translation in Avicenna, *The Physics of The Healing* (a parallel English-Arabic text edited, annotated, and translated by Jon McGinnis), Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2009, 209).

³ Levi Della Vida, “Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Islamic Culture,” 208.

foregoing that attempts to make Islam coincide (that is, “correspond in substance, nature or character; agree exactly together or *with*”)⁴ with other things, such as “religion,” “culture,” “civilization,” “symbol system,” or even “discursive tradition,” or to identify an “essence” or “core and kernel,” have fallen short of mapping coherently onto the human and historical phenomenon of Islam—with the result that we are unable to use the term “Islam”/“Islamic” meaningfully. It is to the task of *saying Islam meaningfully* that, in this chapter, I will (eventually) come.

In the foregoing, I identified the conceptual and practical production and accommodation of *internal contradiction* as crucial to the constitution of the human and historical phenomenon of Islam. In this direction, Clifford Geertz has written:

to say that Morocco and Indonesia are both Islamic societies, in the sense that most everyone in them (well over nine-tenths of the population in either case) professes to be a Muslim, is as much to point up their differences as it is to locate their similarities⁵. . . looked at in the proper light, their very differences connect them.⁶

When we seek meaningfully to conceptualize a phenomenon of prolific *difference* and *disagreement* we stand in need of what Stanley Fish once called “a coherent account of *disagreement*.⁷ We need to resist our conceptual predisposition to conceptualize and categorize by the elimination of difference, and conceptualize and categorize, instead, *in terms of inclusion of difference*.⁸ As such, the goal and touchstone of a successful conceptualization of Islam as theoretical object and analytical category must be to *locate and explain*, to the fullest degree possible, the *logic of internal contradiction that allows contradictory statements and actions to cohere meaningfully to their putative object*—whether this coherence lies in idea, imagination, practice, substance or process. Such a conceptualization should enable us to use the term “Islam/Islamic” in a manner that *comprehends* the integrity and identity of the complex historical and human phenomenon at play and at stake, rather than distorting or fracturing it.

⁴ *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 436.

⁵ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 13–14.

⁶ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 55.

⁷ Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* 338.

⁸ Even the “islams-not-Islam” approach is based on the elimination of difference: it operates on the premise that the fact of difference means that each difference constitutes the existence of a *different thing*, this on the assumption that a *single thing* cannot comprise so much difference.



If we are meaningfully to conceptualize Islam we must take into account the full range of component elements and trajectories and values of human and historical Islam that we have seen suggested by the ideas and practices described in Chapter 1 of this book, such as *exploration, ambiguity, ambivalence, wonder, aestheticization, diffusion, differentiation, polyvalence, relativism* and *contradiction*. These component elements, trajectories and values must be accounted for alongside their counter-components of *prescription, restriction, homogenization, monovalency, orthodoxy, and agreement*, which have habitually and almost universally been given constitutive pride of place in conceptualizations of Islam. When we/Muslims think of human and historical Islam, it is incumbent on us/Muslims to think also of *a human and historical phenomenon of exploration, a human and historical phenomenon of ambiguity and ambivalence, a human and historical phenomenon of relativism, and a human and historical phenomenon of internal contradiction*. To marginalize these component elements is to fall short of coming to conceptual terms with the modes of thinking and living that are at the center of the human and historical phenomenon of Islam.

Symptomatic of the marginalization of exploration, ambiguity, ambivalence, relativism and contradiction in the conceptualization of Islam is the fact that a unique feature of the study of societies of Muslims, as compared to other societies, is that so much *value* is given and *meaning* ascribed to the *prescriptive* and *restrictive* discourses of Muslims, such as law and creed, and so little *value* is given and *meaning* ascribed to *explorative* and *creative* discourses such as fictional literature, art and music. Simply, when Muslims act and speak *exploratively*—as opposed to *prescriptively*—as they seem to have spent a very great deal of their historical time doing, they are somehow not seen to be acting and speaking in a manner and register that is representative, expressive and constitutive of Islam. Thus, a vast historical corpus of the direct self-statements of Muslims is either analytically disqualified from being representative of Islam, or is regarded as only *qualifiedly* representative of Islam—as exemplified in the distinction between “religion” and “culture.”

To my mind, when Muslims claim to be speaking and acting *as Muslims*, that is, to be speaking and acting *in Islam* we need, as an analytical and conceptual matter, to take them *at their word*, and thus to take their considered self-statements as salient to the phenomenon with which they identify themselves, and with which they regard themselves to be in coherent affiliation and adherence. We should take these considered Muslim self-statements to be

expressions of the *values* of their authors *speaking and acting as Muslims*, and to be mobilizations of a perceived higher principle of *value to Muslims*. My point is not that “whatever Muslims say or do is Islam,” but that we should treat *whatever* Muslims say or do as a potential site or locus for the expression and articulation of *being Muslim/Islam*—and look at each of those statements with eyes wide open to how they are meaningfully formed and informed by the value of Islam/Islamic. Rather than *confine* the expressive loci of Islam, we should take on board John Bowen’s observation of

the centrality of speech events; the cultural importance of commentary on those events; and the heterogeneous, “dispersive” quality of religious discourse . . . *dispersive* in that they cannot be resolved into a single set of symbols.⁹

When we think of discourse that is constitutive and representative of “Islam/Islamic” (which word and concept we now know to put in place of “religious” in the above quotation, thus: “the heterogeneous ‘dispersive’ quality of Islamic discourse”) we should not gravitate reflexively to the genres of scriptural exegesis, such as commentaries on the Qur’ān and Hadith, and prescriptive works such as legal and creedal texts, but rather look *expansively* to the full gamut of genres and registers in which Muslims, *speaking and acting consciously as Muslims*, expressed that which they regarded as being of existential meaning, moment and value.¹⁰ It is the full range of this meaningful discourse—that genus which Naṣīr-ud-Dīn Ṭūsī called *kalām-i ma’nā-dār*, “meaning-bearing discourse”¹¹—which expresses what Muslims, speaking and acting as Muslims, conceptualize as Islam.

For example, by force of bad conceptual and taxonomic habit, we are exponentially more likely to accord representative and constitutive Islamic

⁹ Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 9–10. See also the sound prescription of Elliot Bazzano: “If Islamic Studies scholars wish to understand Muslims holistically, they must therefore pay attention to Muslims’ interpretations of texts, artistic expressions, local customs, and all other behaviors and outlooks that influence the ways practitioners relate to their multivalent religious traditions,” Elliott Bazzano, “Research Methods and Problems,” in Clinton Bennett (editor), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies*, London: Bloomsbury 2013, 29–56, at 29.

¹⁰ Devin DeWeese speaks of the “pedagogical usefulness, at least in tactical terms, of ‘descripturizing’ the roots of authority in Islam, as a counter to the subtle effects of modernist Muslim discourse upon scholarship (including even historical scholarship) on the Muslim world,” DeWeese, “Authority,” 52.

¹¹ Naṣīr-ud-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Mi>yār al-ash’ār* (edited by Mu’azzamah Iqbālī A’zām), in Mu’azzamah Iqbālī A’zām, *Shī’r va shā’iri dar āṣār-i Khwājah Naṣīr-ud-Dīn Ṭūsī*, Tehran: Sāzmān, 1368 sk [1989], 164, cited in J. Landau, “Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Poetic Imagination in the Arabic and Persian Tradition,” in Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (editor), *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012, at 15–65, at 40.

value to a verse-by-verse exegesis of the chapter of Yūsuf/Joseph in the Qur’ān that we happen to find bound between the two boards of a book belonging to the scholarly genre of *tafsīr*—this on the “self-evident” basis of it being a formal commentary on *scripture* and thus a more “strictly-speaking religious/Islamic” work—than we are likely to assign such representative and constitutive value to a text that creatively and exploratively assimilates, re-imagines, re-configures, re-presents, re-formulates, re-valorizes, and re-tells the story, such as the celebrated and prodigiously circulated poem of Jāmī on the story of Yūsuf (Joseph) and Zulaykhā (the biblical Potiphar’s wife), which we are likely to classify “self-evidently” as “literature,” or as “Sufi literature,” or by some such *secondary* valorization.¹² In Jāmī’s poem, Zulaykhā is transformed from the agent of sinful temptation (the dominant evaluation of her in the genre of Qur’ān commentary) to the embodiment of the passion of true love (and thus a model for the Sufi love of God). On a straightforward measure of human and historical scale (which we can gauge by the number of manuscript and printed copies of the work), the single text by which the Qur’ānic story of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, which God has called “the best of stories,”¹³ has most been given *meaning* in societies of Muslims (certainly in the societies of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex)—that is, the text by which, more than by any other text, Muslims have conceptualized and found life-value in the story Yūsuf and Zulaykhā—is *not* a formal Qur’ān-commentary/*tafsīr* (with the dominant interpretive values of that genre) but the poem of Jāmī (with *its* interpretive values).¹⁴ Not to conceptualize human and histori-

¹² An example of this tendency is the following assignation by a scholar of Islamic studies, on the basis of Erich Auerbach’s conceptualization of biblical hermeneutics, of cosmology to *sacred text* or *scripture*, as distinguished from non-sacred texts: “I take cosmology to constitute a symbolic vision of a supramundane ordering of and relation to mundane reality—a cosmos in the classical monotheistic sense of the term. World view refers to the implications this has for normative sociocultural forms, relationships and institutions. Cosmology is narrated in sacred texts and requires, as Erich Auerbach has so cogently argued for biblical narrative, interpretation.

The world of Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other senses, issues, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it . . . In light of these observations, I locate cosmology in the sacred text of scripture. (Richard C. Martin, “Clifford Geertz Observed: Understanding Islam As Cultural Symbolism,” in Robert L. Moore and Frank E. Reynolds (editors), *Anthropology and the Study of Religion*, Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1984, 11–30, at 26–27).

My point is that cosmology is elaborated in whatsoever texts make cosmological claims, and that in the discourses of Muslims, these are *all* texts produced by Muslims writing and acting as Muslims.

¹³ *ahsan al-qasas*, Qur’ān 12:3 Yūsuf.

¹⁴ Thus, a study of the contents of the surviving manuscript libraries of Tajikistan and Uz-

cal Islam in terms of the *constitutive primacy* of texts such as Jāmī's *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* is to *misread* Islam.

Similarly, one of the two or three most important texts (and for many, *the* single most important text) by which the Qur'ān was made meaningful by Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex was also not a formal *tafsīr*, but a work of literary fiction—namely, the 26,000-verse *magnum opus* of Our Master (Mawlānā) Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273), the *Maṣnavī-yi Ma'navī* (Distiches/Doublets of Meaning). Rūmī's *Maṣnavī* is *the* historical exemplar of creative and explorative engagement with the Qur'ān—that is, of exegesis by re-imagining, re-configuring, re-presenting, re-formulating, re-valorizing, and re-narrating. Like Sufi experience itself, the *Maṣnavī* defies meaningful description: it must be tasted to be known. Through a spiraling continuum of versified stories—which might be likened to a *roman fleuve* in full spate—it expresses Rūmī's inexhaustible vision of the myriad ramifications of the meanings of Islam.

Rūmī himself proclaimed in his introduction to the *Maṣnavī*:

This Book of the *Maṣnavī* is the roots of the sources of the principles of *dīn* in revealing the secrets of attainment-(to-Truth) and certainty. It is the greatest jurisprudence [*fiqh*] of God and is the luminous Law [*shar'*] of God and is the clearest proof of God; the likeness of its light “as a niche in which is a lamp.”¹⁵

Rūmī thus presents his book as being illuminated by the very same light by which God characterizes Himself in the celebrated “Light Verse” of the Qur'ān: “God is the Light of the heavens, and of the earth. The likeness of His light is like that of a niche containing a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass

bekistan—two regions of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex sadly neglected in the historical scholarship—found 783 manuscript copies of Jāmī's works (to which the author adds: “These figures do not reflect the actual number of manuscripts in the region, which is considerably higher); see Aftandil Erkanov, “Manuscripts of the Works by Classical Persian Authors (Hāfiẓ, Jāmī, Bidil): Quantitative Analysis of 17th-19th C. Central Asian Copies,” in Maria Szuppe (editor), *Iran: Questions et connaissances. Actes du IVe Congrès des Études Iraniennes organisé par la Societas Iranologica Europaea, Paris, 6–10 Septembre 1999*, Vol. II: *Périodes Médiévale et Moderne*, Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2002, 213–228, at 225. This compares very favourably with the number of even the most widely studied Qur'ān commentaries in the region (those of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Baydāwī, and al-Husayn Vā'iz-i Kāshifī; for manuscript copies of the first two, see footnotes 193 and 191, in Chapter 1; for a sense of the circulation of the latter, see Sands, “On the Popularity of Husayn Vā'iz-i Kashifī's *Mavāhib-i 'aliyya*”).

¹⁵ *uṣul uṣul uṣul al-dīn fi kashf asrār al-wuṣūl wa al-yaqīn wa huwa fiqh Allāh al-akbar wa shar' Allāh al-azhar wa burhān Allāh al-azhar mathalu nūri-hi ka-mishkātin fi-hā miṣbāhin*; Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, 1:11 (compare Nicholson's translation at 2:3).

like a radiant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive tree neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil might give light even had fire not touched it. Light upon light! God guides unto His light whom He wills. He strikes similitudes for humankind—and God knows each and every thing!”¹⁶ Neither is this merely a rhetorical flourish on Rūmī’s part. His son and successor, Sultān Walad, narrates how:

One of our companions complained to my father saying, “Some scholars (*dānišmandān*) argued with me, saying, “Why do they call the *Masnavī* the Qur’ān [*Masnavī rā Qur’ān chirā mīgūyand*]?”

I responded, “It is a commentary (*tafsīr*) on the Qur’ān.”

My father [i.e., Rūmī] was silent for a moment. Then he said, “O, dog! Why shouldn’t it be [*chirā nābashaz*]? O, donkey! Why shouldn’t it be? O, your-sister’s-a-whore! Why shouldn’t it be? For there is nothing enclosed in the folds of the words of the Prophets and Friends of God save for the lights of Divine secrets [*anvār-i asrār-i ilāhi*]. The Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) has sprung from their pure hearts and has flowed upon the streams of their tongues.”¹⁷

Thus, when Jāmī famously called the *Masnavī* “the Qur’ān in the Persian tongue” and said of its author “He is not a prophet, but he has a book,”¹⁸ he was, if anything, doing no more than (politely) re-stating Rūmī’s own self-conceptualization.

The *Masnavī*, in which are embedded around 4,500 direct citations of verses of the Qur’ān¹⁹ (quite aside from allusions thereto) as well as more than 700 Hadiths,²⁰ is, effectively, a Qur’ānic exegesis by other means.²¹ It is those

¹⁶ *Allāhu nūr al-samāwāti wa al-ardi mithlu nūri-hi ka-mishkātin fi-hā miṣbāhin al-miṣbāḥu fi zujājatin al-zujājatu ka-anna-hā kawkabun durriyyun yūqādu min shajaratim mubārakatin zaytūnatim lā sharqiyatim wa lā gharbiyyatim yukādū zaytu-hā yudī’u wa law lam tamsas-hu nārun nārun ‘alā nūrin yahdī Allāhu ilā nūri-hi man yashā’u wa yadribu Allāhu al-amthālā li-al-nāsī wa Allāhu bi-kulli shay’in ‘alām, Qur’ān 24:35 al-Nūr.*

¹⁷ al-Aflākī, *Manāqib-i ‘ārifīn*, 1:291. Compare the translation in Aflākī, *The Feats of the Knowers of God* (translated by O’Kane), 200; and in Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma*, 87.

¹⁸ For these proverbial statements see, for example, Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphant Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddīn Rumi*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, 367, 369.

¹⁹ See the indices to Bahā’-ud-Dīn Khurramshāhī and Siyāmāk Mukhtārī, *Qur’ān va masnavī farhangvārah-i tāṣir-i āyāt-i Qur’ān dar adabiyāt-i Masnavī*, Tehran: Nashr-i Qatrah, 1387 h [1967] (4th edition), 435–499.

²⁰ Bādī-uz-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīs-i Masnavī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tīhrān, 1334 sh [1995].

²¹ I first proposed the idea of “tafsīr by other means”—or the difference between *tafsīr* as formal genre and *tafsīr* as hermeneutical activity—at a conference on “Qur’ānic Tafsīr: Interpre-

other means that are important for the present purpose. For, whereas the standard form of a work of Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) follows the textual arrangement of the Qur'ān and explicates its text through reference to and contextualization in an established storehouse of lexical and narrative reference materials, the *Masnavī* does something very different. Rūmī *dis-locates* the text of the Qur'ān by plucking out of it short passages, individual verses or phrases; he then *re-locates* these passages, verses, and phrases into the vast and rich tapestry of the stories of his own weaving that make up his *Distiches/Doublets of Meaning*. In this way, the Qur'ān and fiction become mutually embedded and mutually transposed. Numerous passages of the *Masnavī* are presented explicitly as exegeses of particular Qur'ānic verses; also, and transversely, verses from the Qur'ān are used by Rūmī as instruments for the exegesis of his own stories—that is, to explain the meanings of his own imaginative fictions. Two examples out of hundreds will suffice here. There is Rūmī's "Story of the prince to whom the true kingdom displayed itself (such that the realities of) *on the Day when a man shall flee from his brother and his mother and his father* [=Qur'ān 80:34 'Abasa]"²² became the object of his immediate

tation and Reinterpretation," Princeton University, October 15, 2005, when discussing the poetical engagement with the Qur'ānic story of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā. I fully endorse the plea of Amer Latif that "Tafsīr should be seen both as genre and as process and, regarded in this fashion, studies of Qur'anic interpretation done outside the *tafsīr* genre . . . the study of poetic and creative writings, therefore, deserves a prominent place in the field of Qur'anic interpretation," Amer Latif, "Qur'anic Narratives and Sufi Hermeneutics: Rūmī's Interpretations of Pharaoh's Character," PhD Dissertation, Stony Brook University, 2009, 106–107. Omar Ali-de-Unzaga has spoken of "*citational exegesis*, a term that refers to the insertion of 'quotational borrowing' or Qur'anic elements—verses, idioms, words, concepts, images and figures—verbatim or by way of reminiscence or echoing of the Qur'ān in works of classical Islamic thought. This citational process implies an interpretation, a particular reading, of the text which is the result of the process of transportation and adaptation that a textual element from the Qur'ān undergoes from its original setting to its new interpretive *locus*. It is important to remark that here I am not referring to formal Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), nor even to explicit interpretations of particular Qur'anic motifs in intellectual or literary works. By exegesis I mean the intellectual process that allows authors to confer, attach or impose meaning onto a Qur'anic element in the process of its quotation. The quotation, then, is a transposition of the Qur'anic element into a new setting (which we will call the recipient text) that inevitably results in the semantic transformation of both the recipient text and in the interpretive reading of the Qur'ān. Once a Qur'anic element or textual unit is cited in another work with an implied meaning, this immediately indicates that the way that element is understood when reading it in the text of the Qur'ān is itself coloured and limited by the meaning implied in the citation," Omar Ali-de-Unzaga, "Citational Exegesis of the Qur'an: Towards a Theoretical Framework for the Construction of Meaning in Classical Islamic Thought: the Case of the *Epistles of the Pure Brethren (Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*)," in Abdou Filali-Ansary and Aziz Esmail (editors), *The Construction of Belief: Reflections on the Thought of Muhammad Arkoun*, London: Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations, 2012, 168–193, at 171–172.

²² *yawma yafirru al-mar'u min akhī-hi wa ummi-hi wa abi-hi.*

experience.”²³ While this is the stated exegetical orientation of the story, its narrative orientation is expressed in the title of Nicholson’s translation: *The Prince and the Witch of Kabul*. It may safely be stated that there is no text in the formal genre of *tafsīr* in which the meaning of this or any other verse of the Qur’ān is illustrated or explicated through a story which involves a prince and witch in Kabul. Or even more disorientingly for those accustomed to thinking about Qur’ānic exegesis in terms of the formal *tafsīr* genre, in connection with the Qur’ānic statement, “No blame attaches to the blind,”²⁴ which appears in the Qur’ānic discussion of those upon whom military service in *jihād* is and is not incumbent, Rūmī adduces his story of the maidservant who, as Reynold A. Nicholson decorously translates, *cum asino herae suae libidinem exercebat et eum tanquam caprum et ursam docuerat libidinem more humano exercere et veretro asini cucurbitam affigebat ne modum excederat*.²⁵

Rūmī’s vivid and memorable stories dislocate and relocate the Qur’ān into new intertextual relations with figures and motifs of poetical and narrative fiction. In this way, they create loci and dynamics for exegetical activity whereby the meaning of the Qur’ān is perceived and produced and illuminated by fiction, and the meaning of fiction is perceived, produced and illuminated by the Qur’ān. As a mode of making meaning and understanding truth from the Qur’ān, it is certainly very different to formal scholarly exegesis. It is a study in *contrasts* to consider that whereas the work of Qur’ānic exegesis most studied in Balkans-to-Bengal *madrasahs* was the *Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), an economical masterpiece of lexicologically- and historically-grounded rationalist hermeneutics,²⁶ the work that seeks to understand the Truth and meanings of the Qur’ān that was most read (and listened to) in Balkans-to-Bengal society *outside* the *madrasah* was the alter-

²³ The translation is that of Nicholson, *Mathnawī*, 2:442; from *Daftar* 4, the passage preceding line 3805, at *Mathnawī*, 947.

²⁴ *laysa ‘alā al-a‘mā harajun; Qur’ān 48:17 al-Fath.*

²⁵ That is, “sated her lust with the donkey of her mistress, training it—just as one trains a goat or a bear—to quench her lust in the manner of a man, having first affixed a gourd to the penis of the donkey to ensure that it not exceed that measure (inside her); *dāstān-i ān kanız kī bā khar-i khātūn shahvat mīrānad va ū-rā chūn buz va khirs āmūkhtah būd shahvat rāndan ādamiyānah va kadūyi dar qazib-i khar mikard tā az andāzah naguzarad*, Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, 1:1088 = *Daftar* 5 between lines 1332 and 1333. For Nicholson’s Latin, see *Mathnawī*, 5:82. For a reproduction of a miniature painting from a manuscript of the *Masnavī* depicting the coupling of the donkey and the maidservant, see Mahdi Tourage, *Rūmī and the Hermeneutics of Eroticism*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007, 218.

²⁶ On the importance of al-Zamakhshari’s *Kashshāf* in the Ottoman *medreseh* curriculum, see Shahab Ahmed and Nenad Filipovic, “The Sultan’s Syllabus: A Curriculum for the Ottoman Imperial *medreses* prescribed in a *fermān* of Qānūni I Süleymān, dated 973 (1565),” *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004), 183–218, at 196–198 and 207–211.

exegesis of Rūmī, which emplotted a different hermeneutic in a different register that offered up *possibilities of meaning* beyond those produced within the four walls of the methods and norms of the academy of *tafsīr*. What is more important is that the *Masnavī* exemplifies a prolific historical phenomenon much larger than itself: namely, that of the dislocations and relocations and circulations of the Qur’ānic text into an economy of meaning-making by Muslims comprising the imagining, reading, performance, audition of, investment in and affiliation with fictional narratives and forms and figures. Thus not only did poetical and narrative works of fiction like *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* and the *Masnavī* serve as *textual loci* for making meaning in terms of the Qur’ān, but also the *majlis*-gatherings for the recitation and discussion of such texts served as ubiquitous *socio-spatial loci* for ongoing engagement with the Qur’ān and the construction of its meanings in the terms and trajectories and modes and norms of the discursive and social cultures of creative and explorative imaginative fiction. In the particular case of the *Masnavī*, it should be noted that with the spread of the Mevlevī Sufi order to encompass a numerically large following and a strong financial base (especially in the Ottoman domains), every Mevlevī *tekkeh* or *khanqāh* became an institutional setting for the recitation and exegesis of the *Masnavī*. Indeed, in Ottoman cities, a Mevlevī center was often known as “Mesnevī House” (*Dār-ul-Mesnevī* or *Mesnevihāneh*).²⁷ Muslims’ reading and conceptualization of Divine truth was informed by a range of inter-textualities of fiction, and by dynamics of self-consciously explorative and creative meaning- and truth-making. As such, we need to look and attend, squarely and consciously, to these fictional discourses as the registers for Muslims’ elaboration and identification of *Islamic* truth and meaning.

For us to conceptualize Islam in terms of expansive registers of possible meaning is to do no more than Muslims themselves did. In a *Dastūr-ul-‘amal* or “Order of Instructions” issued on 21 March 1594 in the name of the Mughal Emperor Akbar and sent to the military and civilian administrative office-holders of the empire, these officials are instructed in particular to read “books of the science of ethics [‘ilm-i akhlāq] which are the medicine of the spirit and the summary of all knowledge . . . so that they may come to know the highest levels of *dīndārī*.”²⁸ *Dīndārī*—literally, “*dīn*-bearing”—is a concept best rendered as “consciousness of *dīn*” or “*dīn*-fulness.” The books specifically named for this purpose are the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* of Tūsī, the *Masnavī* of Rūmī, al-Ghazzālī’s *Ihyā ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Revivification of the Sciences of *Dīn*)

²⁷ See Semih Ceyhan, “Mesnevī,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İSAM, 1988–2013, at 29:325–335, at 334.

²⁸ Abū-l-Fażl ‘Allāmī, *Har sih daftar*, Lucknow: Mirzā In‘ām-Allah Bēg, 1279 h [1862], 1:40.

and his *Kīmīyā-i sa‘ādat* (Alchemy of Happiness), and *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*. Two points are worth noting here. The first is the identification of *akhlāq*-ethics—of “practical philosophy”—with *dīn*-fulness. The second is the identification of works of fiction—Rūmī’s *Masnavī* and *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*—as works of *akhlāq*-ethics which are expressly “*dīn*-bearing”: which are productive for the reader of the values of “*dīn*-fulness.” It is also worth noting that these works are central not merely to the Mughal canon, but to the Balkans-to-Bengal canon as a whole: the library of the Ottoman Sultan Bāyezid II, for example, contained (not less than) fourteen complete copies of the *Masnavī*, thirteen copies of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, ten of the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, ten of the *Kīmīyā-i sa‘ādat*, and nine of *Iḥyā ‘ulum al-dīn*.²⁹ The reader will also recall from Chapter 1 the *ākhōnd* of Herat who was still in the 1970s teaching the fifteenth-century Persian adaptation and elaboration of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, the *Anvār-i Suhaylī* of Ḥusayn Vā’iz-i Kāshī, to villagers around Herat for the benefit of what we can now call their *dīndārī*.³⁰

Brian Stock wrote in his classic *The Implications of Literacy*, “As texts informed experience, so men and women began to live texts.”³¹ When we seek to conceptualize Islam, we must ask “Which texts informed experience of Islam?” (whether the audiences of those texts be literate or not), and “What does it mean to *live those texts*”? Pursuant to my argument that we need to conceptualize Islam in a way that takes seriously the full range of the self-statement of Muslims speaking as Muslims, we can answer saying: “As fictional texts informed experience of Divine truth, men and women began to live fictional texts as Divine truth.” Once we are able to recognize fictional texts as “bearing *dīn*,” we are more readily able to conceive of the *location* of Islam in terms of the larger communicative practices of Muslims speaking as Muslims about *being Muslim*. Fictional texts construct and communicate Islam through the exercise of the creative and explorative imagination. A society that lives these texts is necessarily a society possessed of the sensibilities and values of the modalities of fiction—that is, precisely, of *exploration, ambiguity, ambivalence, wonder, aestheticization, diffusion, differentiation, polyvalence, relativism and contradiction*. It is, further, a society that must cultivate the hermeneutical capacity stipulated in the introduction to the

²⁹ See al-‘Āṭufī, *Daftar al-kutub*, 230–232, 112–113, 189, 107–108, and 105–106.

³⁰ Two studies that look extensively at Persian fiction-texts as sources for ethics are Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, *Moralia: Les notions morales dans le littérature Persane du 3e/9e au 7e/13e siècle*, Paris: Éditions Recherches sur les Civilizations, 1986; and Zahir Ahmad Siddiqi, *Akhlaqiyāt-i Irānī Adabiyāt-i Fārsī*, Lahore: Government College University, 2003.

³¹ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, 4.

portrait-album of Sultan Ahmed I: namely, “the moral-detecting and -drawing eye,” the capacity to see, to read, and to draw out Divine truth and value, even in—indeed, *precisely in*—the “imagining and imaging” of “such strange effects and marvelous forms”³² as the story of the concupiscent maid-servant and her mistress’s donkey.



Let us turn to consider probably the most prolific example of living Islam by living fiction. While we moderns have little difficulty in conceiving, for example, of the historical person of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792), the founder of the momentous “Wahhābi” movement of Najd, as a historically representative and influential Islamic prototypical figure, we find it considerably more difficult to conceive of the *fictional protagonist* of the most prolifically retold of love stories, *Majnūn Laylā*, as an exemplary and influential Islamic archetypal figure. While it may, at first blush, seem counter-intuitive to propose a *fictional character* as an *Islamic archetype*, this is exactly who and what Majnūn is. The “real” Majnūn was a poet who lived in the first century of Islam by the name of Qays from the tribe of Banū ‘Āmīr—and was thus also, like Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, from the Najd region of Arabia; these very different gentlemen are probably the two most influential Najdis in history—who fell in love with a woman called Laylā. Laylā was unattainable, and so great was Qays’ love for her that he became possessed by his love, went mad, and spent his life traversing the desert in search of her caravan. On account of the obliteration of his being in his love for Laylā, Qays is known as Majnūn Laylā: “Laylā’s madman” or “the one possessed by Laylā” (the word Majnūn means, literally, “possessed by a *jinn*”; a *jinn* is a genie, one of the species of non-corporeal beings that, the Qur’ān tells us, inhabit the World of Unseen). In the intellectual articulation, literary elaboration, and social proliferation of the “*madhhab* of love,” the figure of Majnūn was taken up by the practitioners of the *madhhab* and made the *personification of the ethos* of love. Majnūn was cast as the hero of the epic of his love for Laylā—an epic that was told and re-told in the poetry of the languages of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (and became a major subject for miniature painting). There are probably about a hundred versions of the Majnūn Laylā epic—the most celebrated being those by the canonical Persian poets, Nizāmī (d. 1188, whose seminal epic is regarded as having ushered in the epoch of the Majnūn archetype), by Amīr

³² See the translation of the introduction to the portrait-album of Sultan Ahmed I in Chapter 1.

Khusraw (who dedicated his version of the tale to his beloved, Nizām-ud-Dīn Awliyā), and by Jāmī; as well as by the greatest literary figure of Chaghatāy Turkish, ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī (d. 1501, who was advisor to Jāmī’s patron, Sultan Husayn Bayqarā, and who built the mausoleum of Farid-ud-Din Attār), and by the Azeri Turkish master-poet, Fuzūlī (d. 1566)—as well as modern theater plays and movies in several languages.³³ Majnūn—“the one possessed by passion”—is quite simply the *archetypal lover* of the history of societies of Muslims; he is effectively the Imām of the *madhhab* of love. He has been invoked, proverbialized, metaphorized and sublimated into the image-vocabulary of the various languages spoken by Muslims to the point where he can be invoked without any need to name him at all: it is sufficient merely to allude to one of the numerous re-iterated dramatic motifs of the Laylā-Majnūn epic lexicon—such as “the torn feet” (as Majnūn wandered through the desert in search of Laylā, his feet were torn by the desert thorns and bled, causing flowers to bloom in the sand), “the broken collar and the rent shirt” (in an attempt to bare/bear the torment of his passion, Majnūn broke his collar and tore open his shirt), or the “stone in the hand” (when Majnūn approached a town, the children of the settlement would stone the strange-looking madman back into the desert). All these motifs and many more were absorbed into the image-vocabulary of *ghazal* love-poetry—and new motifs synthesized and generated. And, with the socio-literary proliferation from about the twelfth century onwards of the poetic form of the *ghazal* as the main communicative vehicle and expression of the proliferating socio-literary theme of love to the point where the *ghazal* became the pre-eminent form of poetry recited in the societies of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, the repeated invocation and reiteration of the Majnūn motif-vocabulary progressively and cumulatively conveyed to, and reinforced in, the consciousness of the audience of the *ghazal* the experience of Majnūn as the iconic experience of love.³⁴

The point is that it would have been extremely difficult for a Muslim in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex to *experience love* or *desire* without that experience taking as a locus of reference and self-identification and *meaning* the

³³ See the very useful article by Ch. Pellat, J. T. P. de Bruijn, B. Flemming, and J. A. Haywood, “Majnūn Laylā,” in C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat (editors), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition) Volume V*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985, 1102–1107. A valuable foundation for the study of the Majnūn-Laylā phenomenon in the history of societies of Muslims has been laid by the respective rich monographs of Agâh Surî Levend, *Arap, Fars ve Türk Edebiyatında Leylâ ve Mecnun Hikâyesi*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1959; and of Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylî and Majnûn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizâmi's Epic Romance*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003.

³⁴ Seyed-Gohrab notes, for example, that there are already more than a hundred references to Majnūn and Laylā in the thirteenth-century *Dîvân* of Rûmî; Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylî and Majnûn*, 74.

fictional figure of Majnūn whose passionate, self-obliterating, love for Laylā configures precisely the *ambiguities and multivalencies* of all three of the carnal, Platonic and Divine registers of quotidian love (the poet-lovers' Laylā is, of course, very much the signifier of the Divine Beloved). Indeed, if Muslim self-identification is a criterion upon which to make such an assessment, probably the most widely influential and *exemplary* figure in Islamic history after the Prophet Muḥammad (the Qur'ānic "beautiful model [*uswah ḥasanah*]")³⁵ and the Imāms 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib (the model of chivalric youth [Arabic: *futuwwah*, Persian: *javānmardi*] for Sunnis and Shi'is alike) and al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (the model of martyrdom for Truth, for Sunnis and Shi'is alike), for what Talal Asad called "the formation of moral selves" is the fictional person of Majnūn, made real in the experience of Muslims.³⁶ The following smattering of couplets by Urdu poets authored over three centuries (and selected from the tens-of-thousands of couplets on the Majnūn-Laylā theme in the languages of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex only by the random and limited fact of my memory) will suffice to illustrate the prodigious and profound extent of the *Muslim identification with, assimilation to and internalization of Majnūn*. For example, in the eighteenth century, the great Urdu and Persian poet of Delhi, Mir Taqī Mir (1723–1810), in presenting *himself as lover*—that is, in seeking to translate (the literary conceit of) his personal experience of love and to make it meaningful to his audience—did so, of course, by invoking Majnūn:

Qays succeeded to the prayer-mat of my shrine—after me!

My place in the desert did not remain vacant—after me!

Keep sharp the point of every thorn, O! desert of passion!

Perhaps, there will come yet another with torn feet—after me!³⁷

³⁵ See Qur'ān 33:21 al-Āḥzāb.

³⁶ Irfan Ahmad insists "that Muslim tradition, *pace* Asad, ought to be so conceptualized that it includes . . . diverse views . . . Islam as a discursive tradition is not exhausted by its relation to . . . Qur'an and *hadith*," and cites as texts "integral to Muslim traditions" and to which Muslims "refer and relate" the "myths of Lēla-Majnūn, Shīrūn-Farhād, or Taj Mahal." The problem, though, is that Ahmad does not provide us with a rationale as to *why* these texts should be regarded as *Islamic* in the same (or indeed a different) way as Qur'an and Hadith—that is, what renders a text invoked by Muslims as *Islamic*, as distinct from it being merely a text invoked by Muslims; Ahmad "Immanent Critique and Islam," 110–11. My point is that these texts are *Islam ic* on Asad's own terms of the work they do: "the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it), and the production of appropriate knowledges."

³⁷ ā kē sajjādah-nashīn Qays hu'ā mērē ba'd / nah rahi dasht mēn khālī mērī jā mērē ba'd // . . . // tēz rakhnā sar-e har khār kō a'ē dashl-i junūn / shāyad ā jā'ē kō'i ablāh pā mērē ba'd; Sayyid Ahmād Dīhlavī, *Farhang-i Āṣafīyyah*, Delhi: Daftār-i Farhang-i Āṣafīyyah, 1918, 3:36. I should

For Mir, or any other poet, to present himself in eighteenth-century Delhi society as the superlative lover there is only one model he needs to outdo, namely Majnūn. This he does by the simple announcement that Qays was, in fact, Mir's disciple: it so happens that Mir had already preceded Qays in treading the path through the desert of love's madness! Qays' accomplishment is only that he became the custodian of Mir's tomb-shrine, in that he succeeded Mir as the master of the Sufi order of the desert-wanderers of love.³⁸ The desert of love's passion belongs first and foremost to Mir Taqī Mir—and only in the way of Mir, to Qays. Mir is the original Majnūn, the original lover (of Laylā and of God)! And now that Mir has set forth the way of going about (that is, the *madhhab*) of the "desert of passion," others seeking to emulate Mir/Qays/Majnūn may yet tread the desert in quest of Laylā, their feet cut to shreds by thorns.

A century later, in the same city, the great Ghālib wrote the following couplet:

In my childhood, Asad! I, too, at Majnūn,
Had raised a stone—'ere I remembered my own head!³⁹

Here Ghālib (whose name was Asad) alludes to one of the most famous motifs of the Majnūn-Laylā legend: the scene where Majnūn, having walked through the desert, comes upon a town—only for the people, alarmed at the sight of this disheveled madman, to set their children upon him to stone him back into the desert.⁴⁰ The motif sums up the tension—if not the outright incompat-

note that, although this *ghazal* does not appear in the published *Divān* of Mir (the author of the *Farhang-i Āṣafiyah* says expressly that he does not know who it is by), it is almost universally attributed to him (indeed, it is one of the *ghazals* most associated with Mir in the minds of the community of the Urdu *ghazal*). A variant of the second hemistich of the first couplet is *nah rahī dasht mēn khālī kōī jā mērē bā'd*, "There was no place left empty in the desert after me" (which is how the couplet is sung in the prodigiously circulated audio-recording of the peerless singer of *ghazal* Mahdi Hasan [1927–2012]).

³⁸ Mir calls Majnūn his *sajjādah nashin*, literally: "the one who sits on the prayer mat," meaning the one who inherits the custodianship of a Sufi tomb-shrine and, with it, the leadership of the community of the shrine. On the social significance of the institution of the *sajjādah nashin* in eighteenth- to twentieth-century North India, see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1988, at 40–56.

³⁹ *mayn nē Majnūn pih larakpan mēn Asad / sang uṭhāyā thā kih sar yād āyā*, Ghālib, *Dīvān-i Ghālib*, 2:176.

⁴⁰ For a miniature painting (unfortunately, somewhat damaged) illustrating this scene as narrated in the *Majnūn-Laylā* of Amir Khusraw, see MS London, British Library, Or. 11327, f. 211a cited in Barbara Brend, *Perspectives on Persian Painting: Illustrations to Amir Khusrav's Kham-sah*, London: Routledge, 2003, 14 and 303). For a variation on the theme, see the miniature painting from the *Majnūn-Laylā* of Nizāmi in MS London, British Library, Or. 2265, reproduced in

ibility—between the life of True Love, and the life of the city and society which does not recognize the true meaning of love, and also fears the destabilizing effects of the Truth of the Lover. In this couplet, Ghālib first *inserts himself* into the Majnūn-Laylā story as one of the children of the city going out in the street to stone Majnūn; and then inserts the Majnūn-Layla story into himself when he realizes, stone-in-hand, that he, too, might one day *be Majnūn*.

In the twentieth century, in a superb *coup de bouleversemement*, the poet, philosopher and modernist reformer, Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877–1938), personified not just himself-the-poet-lover as Majnūn, but also personified God-the-Lover as Majnūn:

On the Day of Gathering, my passion will not rest purposeless:
Either my collar will be torn—or the shirt of God will be torn!⁴¹

On the Day of Judgement—the day when all truth is laid bare—says Iqbāl, the Truth of love's passion will out: either I will be (Majnūn-)of-the-torn-shirt, or I will reach out and tear the shirt of God—thereby making God in my/Majnūn's image as me/Majnūn-of-the-torn-shirt!⁴²

The deep-rootedness and pervasiveness of the modular personality of Majnūn as a *figure of meaning* is well-expressed in the fact that the Majnūn image can readily be *subverted* to produce alternative meaning in satire and comedy. Thus, the satirical poet, Sayyid Zamīr Ja‘fārī (1916–1999), satirizes the condition of modern Muslims by invoking their plight as the plight of Majnūn:

It is all about torn shirts; it is all about broken collars;
All that the *ghazal* is about; it is all about Muslims!⁴³

Stuart Carey Welch, *Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting, 1501–1576*, Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1979, 165.

⁴¹ *fāriġh tō nah baythēgā maḥshar mēn junūn mērā / yā apnā garēbān chāk yā dāman-i yazdān chāk*, Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Bāl-i Jibril*, 50, in Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl (Urdu)*, Lahore: Iqbāl Academy Pakistan, 1990, at 375.

⁴² The theme of Iqbāl's quarrel with God runs famously through his poetry, beginning with the two poems which established his reputation, the *Shikvah* (Complaint) and the *Javāb-i Shikvah* (Answer to the Complaint)—being the Muslim's complaint to to God, and God's reply.

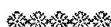
⁴³ *daridah dāmanōn khastah garibānōn kī bātēn hayñ / ghazal mēn jitnī bātēn hayñ: musalmānōn kī bātēn hayñ*, Sayyid Zamīr Ja‘fārī, *ghazal* entitled “On Listening to a *ghazal* [ék *ghazal sun kar*],” in Sayyid Zamīr Ja‘fārī, *Mā fū-z-Zamīr*, Lahore: Maktabah-i Urdū Da’ijist, 1970. 67 (cited by Muḥammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (2nd edition), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, 580—the translation may be compared).

Again, much can be read out of this couplet—but my purpose here simply is to draw attention to the easy manner in which the poet identifies the subject of the *ghazal* as Majnūn who is, in turn, ironically identified—in mutual dilapidation—with Muslims *collectively*. All Muslims are Majnūn of the *ghazal*!

Then, there is Sayyid Muhammad Ja'fari's further invocation of Majnūn, which I heard, when travelling in the family car in Kuala Lumpur at some point in the late 1980s, on an audio-cassette recorded by my father from Radio Pakistan in 1974 of a poetry recital in commemoration of Muhammad Iqbāl, where he recited the following couplet in a *ghazal* in the same rhyme and meter as a couplet by Iqbāl:

Majnūn merrily goes about his desert-wanderings:
What is he to do who has a wife and children?⁴⁴

Here, the figure of Majnūn is invoked to express the most quotidian sentiment of the ordinary modern urban Muslim man: the demoralized middle-aged husband, householder and employee, weighed down by his responsibilities, despairing of intensity and passion and true meaning in life, yearning to cast off the oppressive habit of society and the world and to walk in the way of the *madhab* of 'ishq—yearning, that is, *to be Majnūn*.



The last two couplets raise the subject of a literary register that is not usually taken into consideration when thinking about Islam: namely, *humour*. Yet, if we are to make the claim that Islam diffuses through and informs the full gamut of genres and registers of *meaning-making* in the discourses of Muslims, we can hardly ignore the things that people say to make other people laugh. Laughter is not only the best medicine, it is also *meaningful*: as the ninth-century physician, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, said in his monograph *On Melancholy* of the laughter produced by a joke: "Laughter is produced by the rational soul . . . Its end is the awareness of the soul, when laughing, of the mean-

⁴⁴ *Majnūn mazē sē kartā hay ṣahrā-navardiyān / voh kyā karē jō ṣahib-i ahl-o-'iyāl hō?* Sayyid Muhammad Ja'fari, *ghazal* recited at the 'Allāmah Iqbāl Kī Yād Mēn Kull Pākistān Qawmī-tarīn Mushā'irah [All-Pakistan National Poetry-Recital in Memory of 'Allāmah Iqbāl] held at the Fleet Club, Karachi, 1974, broadcast on Radio Pakistan, audio-cassette recording in possession of the author. The next couplet in this *ghazal* recalls one by Ḥafiz cited in Chapter 1: "Put a little in your pot and drink it up, Mr Shaykh! This is the only thing that might improve your humour! [thōrī sī pī lō dāl kē badnī mēn shaykh-jī / shāyat is hī tarah sē tab'iyyat ba-hāl hō]."

ing of its laughter by gaining clarity about its purpose as either humorous or serious.”⁴⁵

Given the *meaningfulness* of laughter, as noted by the scholar of melancholy, it is worth pondering the fact that we would likely hesitate to think that a discourse of humour might somehow meaningfully be called “Islamic” (that is, that its *meaning* might somehow be produced by identification with Islam); this by the same measure that we would likely *not* hesitate to classify, for instance, a treatise on the meaning of *jihād* as “Islamic.” I bring in this latter example in part because I feel that it would be remiss of me, in this day and age, to write a book entitled *What is Islam?* without some treatment of the subject of *jihād*, which is a word that has acquired a certain centrality in the contemporary Western conceptualizations of and preoccupations with Islam. Muslims are regularly classified by the expert exponents of contemporary Western public analytic discourse as “extremist” or “moderate” in terms of those Muslims’ understanding of and commitment to *al-jihād fi sabīl Allāh*—literally “struggle in the cause of God,” sometimes called the “Sixth Pillar of Islam.” The defining question for modern Western taxonomy is whether Muslims understand *jihād*/struggle as, in the first instance, “warfare against non-Muslims” (which is “extremist”) or as a “spiritual struggle” (which is “moderate”). The argument that the primary meaning of *jihād* is not warfare against non-Muslims, but rather “spiritual struggle,” has been made on the basis of the famous non-canonical Hadith:

The Messenger of God was returning home from one of their battles when he said, “You have returned from the lesser *jihād* to the greater *jihad*.” They said, “And what is the greater *jihad*?” He answered: “Man’s struggle in his soul.”

However, the argument that the Greater Jihād is the Muslim’s spiritual struggle has not been helped by the fact that the chains of transmission of this Hadith are regarded by the experts of the science of Hadith as weak (although several of them acknowledge that the Hadith is “famous on the tongues”): the report appears in none of the authoritative Hadith collections. The popular internet-website, WikiIslam, states further:

All four schools of Sunni jurisprudence (Fiqh) as well as the Shi’ite tradition make no reference at all to the “greater” jihad, only the lesser. So

⁴⁵ Cited in Franz Rosenthal, *Humor in Early Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1956, 134–135 (italics mine). Only a portion of this work (not containing the present passage) has been published, and I have not had access to a complete manuscript.

even before we examine the evidence against the validity of this hadith, we know that the concept of the greater jihad is unorthodox and heretical to the majority of the world's Muslims.⁴⁶

In other words, the orthodox and majoritarian understanding is that *jihād* means, above all, fighting the infidel. That, we are told, is the meaning of *jihād* in Islam.

It might be instructive, here, to see what a representative pre-modern Muslim of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex has to say about the Lesser and Greater Jihāds. Let us turn to the indefatigable Ottoman gentleman-traveler and litterateur, Evliyā Çelebī, who was in the service of the Ottoman Grand Vizier, Melek Ahmed Pasha (whose wife, Qayā Sultān, was a daughter of the Ottoman Sultan Murād IV). Evliyā Çelebī regularly accompanied his master on *gazā*: that is, on military campaign against the infidel (i.e. on *jihād*). Both Evliyā Çelebi and Melek Ahmed Pasha were *gazis*, or *mujahids* (or, in the parlance of modern experts in global security and terrorism studies: *jihādis*). In the following passage, taken from his multi-volume travelogue and geography, the *Seyâhatnâmeh* (*Book of Travels*), Evliyā Çelebī (who, incidentally, was an accomplished Qur'ān-reciter who had memorized the Noble Book) writes a description of the distinguished Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire:

He was good and *dīn*-ful [*dīndār*]⁴⁷ both with regard to learning and conduct [*'ālim vu 'āmil*]: complete and excellent and pious and self-restraining [*parhîzgâr*]: a perfect *gāzi* [Muslim-warrior] and brave vizier, the like of 'Āsif, son of Barakhiyā [the vizier of Solomon] . . . He was very skilled in archery, which is a *sünnet* of the Prophet, and in such sports as javelin throwing, swordplay, mace and spear . . . horsemanship and cavalry exercises. Being a strong and courageous champion, he was also unexcelled in wrestling, familiar with seventy branches of that science: very few champions could bring his back to the ground. But sometimes he would have nice wrestling matches with his wife, Qayā Sultan, for the propagation of the species. In the end he would overcome Qayā Sultan and bring her down. He engaged in this sort of "greatest *jihad*" [*cihād-i ekber*] forty-eight times a year—he did not indulge overmuch in sexual intercourse.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ http://www.wikiislam.net/wiki/Lesser_vs_Greater_Jihad#Lesser_vs_Greater_Jihad_Hadith (viewed on 20 February, 2013).

⁴⁷ See the discussion of *dīndār*, above.

⁴⁸ See the facsimile manuscript edition of Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme* (prepared and indexed

Unlike (the somewhat portentous and grim) WikiIslam, Evliyā Çelebi's primary concern in this passage is precisely *not* with what the Hadith scholars and jurists have to say about what constitutes Lesser and Greater Jihād. Evliya Çelebi is *not* interested in establishing whether the Greater Jihād of the *dīn*-ful⁴⁹ Grand Vizier Melek Ahmed Pasha consists in that "perfect *gāzī*'s" military campaigns against the infidel, or in his "pious and self-restraining" struggle for the edification of his soul. Rather, Evliyā informs his audience that the Grand Vizier's Greatest Jihād consists in his "nice wrestling matches with his wife for the propagation of the species"—as they attempt to pin each other's "back to the ground." The image is all the funnier, for Evliyā's deadpan backgrounding that the Grand Vizier was an expert at seventy different wrestling styles, and for the general knowledge on the part of Evliyā's contemporary audience that the Grand Vizier's royal wife was fully forty-five years younger than her husband, and hence, presumably, more than an energetic match for him in the conjugal ring (forty-eight times a year means once a week, allowing for four weeks of abstinence in Ramadān).⁵⁰ And yet funniest of all is Evliya's *pun*: his *irreverent* choice of the term "Greater Jihād" as a euphemism for sex.⁵¹ Evliyā's audience would have known perfectly well the famous Hadith in which the Prophet said that to return home from battle was to return to the Greater Jihād—it is the pun on this Hadith that *makes this joke*

by Seyit Ali Kahraman), Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2014, 6:48a–b. Other than the first two lines, which I have emended, the translation here is by Robert Dankoff (with a historical introduction by Rhoads Murphrey), *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588–1662) as Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels (Seyahat-name)*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, 278–279.

⁴⁹ In light of Akbar's instructions to the office bearers of the Mughal empire on what they should read to acquire *dīndārī*, it is interesting to note that the *dīndār* Melek Ahmed Pāsha, who is described by Evliya as knowing more than eight hundred legal questions [*mesāyiil ser'iyyeh*] and more than a thousand hadiths (in Arabic), had also memorized the (Persian) *Pandnāmah* of Farid-ud-Dīn 'Attār (a foundational primer of practical ethics), several thousand verses of the (Persian) *Maṣnavī* of Rumi, and of the *Masnavī*-inspired (Turkish) *Ma'nevī* of the Sufi İbrahim Gulşenī (d. 1534), as well as much other Persian and Turkish poetry; see Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman*, 279.

⁵⁰ Evliyā recounts how, on their wedding night, when Qayā Sultan was thirteen years old and her bridegroom in his late forties, she fought off Melek Ahmed Pasha with a dagger. The marriage was reportedly not consummated for another seven years, but thereafter the couple was so close that, when his wife eventually died in childbirth after fifteen years of marriage, the Pasha scandalized his peers by weeping in public at the funeral; see Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman*, 233–235.

⁵¹ In another passage, Evliyā (who clearly liked his own joke) praises God for "the *dīn* of Islam" wherein "there is no monstery," and wherein "we find the strength to eat heartily, to worship, to undertake righteous warfare [*gaza*], and to perform 'the greater jihad' [*cīhād-i ekber*] with such women as are permitted [*hēlāl*] to us" (i.e., wives and concubines); cited from Evliya Çelebi, *Seyāhatnāme*, 7:61a, in Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 118 (I have emended Dankoff's translation).

meaningful and meaningfully funny. Humour takes place precisely in a social and discursive complex or matrix of shared meaning. Here, *to get the joke*—that is, for the “rational soul” to become aware “when laughing, of the meaning of its laughter”—one has to know the Hadith. This joke may not be an expression of piety or devotion or of exegetical and legal reasoning—but it has no *meaning* except as derives from its being embedded (forgive the pun) *in terms of Islam*. Evliya’s joke is made meaningful by the shared vocabulary of the discourse of the community of Islam—*without Islam the joke falls flat*. Evliyā’s joke, of course, depends also on the readiness of his audience to find the pun funny rather than offensive: that is to say, it depends on a certain *Islamic* attitude and sensibility the practitioners of which are not discomfited or threatened by a play on the vocabulary of the putatively sacral.⁵²

But further, and this is crucial, what makes the joke meaningful for Evliyā’s audience—and what makes it a really *good* joke—is that the shared terms of the joke is the very vocabulary that constructs and expresses *being Muslim*. As such, the joke cuts very close to home—indeed, it cuts close to the Muslim *self*. One suspects that when Evilyā’s audience went home to their wives that evening, it would have been very difficult for them to get the joke out of their heads—that is, it would have been difficult for them not to think about their own conjugal exertions in terms of the Greater Jihād: the joke is as much about them as it is about the Grand Vizier. The joke here is, in other words, self-ironic for every Muslim; the joke is not *at Islam* but is *in Islam*: we Muslims might say the joke is on “us”—just as it was in the foregoing couplet of Žamīr Ja‘fari. Self-irony is not the same as irony because, in self-irony, the person is laughing at the thing in terms of which that person makes himself and gives himself meaning. Self-irony is thus simultaneously the affirmation and undermining of the self—what D. C. Muecke once called “a device for turning . . . oneself inside out”⁵³—it is precisely a self-contradictory self-statement. Every Muslim is implicated in Evliyā’s “Greater Jihād” joke *as a Muslim*. Evliyā’s joke is, thus, nothing other than *Islamic*.⁵⁴

⁵² “The problem of humour in Islam finds itself in a position similar to other human activities or articulations that pious authors as well as bigots advertising their own piety, puritans as well as pietists have criticized since the very beginning, while their factual existence in the Muslim world has been widely accepted . . . Similar to humour, music and dance within a strict interpretation of Islamic rules also risk to be regarded as unlawful enjoyment of worldly pleasures.” Ulrich Marzolph, “The Muslim Sense of Humour,” in Hans Geybels and Walter Van Herck (editors), *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, London: Continuum, 2011, 168–185, at 177–178. A study on humour in the community of the Prophet and his Companions is Laylā al-‘Ubaydī, *al-Fakah fi al-Islām*, Beirut: al-Sāqi, 2010.

⁵³ D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, London: Methuen, 1969, 3.

⁵⁴ And it certainly provides a “take” on the Greater vs. Lesser *jihād* debate that contemporary Islam-experts, WikIslam, the jurists, and the Hadith scholars have not considered.



Much more could (and should) be written about humour (including, for example, the use of quotations from and allusions to the Qur'ān in jokes and puns) as a register of *Islamic* meaning.⁵⁵ The above will have to suffice for the present purpose which has been to show that, to conceptualize Islam in a manner that maps meaningfully onto the human and historical phenomenon, we need, for once and for all, to break free of our limited conceptual parameters and to look for Islam in what are, for us, *not* the usual places. We need to take forward the insights in the following statement by the anthropologist, Roy F. Ellen (in which we should, once again, substitute the more capacious word “Islam” for the narrower and distortive word “religion”):

The very structure of Muslim belief and practice indicates its flexibility . . . In the final analysis religion [Islam] is idiom, but it also masquerades as the end in itself most people believe it to be. It is because idiom is so effectively concealed as reality that it so often succeeds in the uses to which it is put. Religion [Islam] is more than a means through which people fashion and express experience of themselves, others and their world. It is more than beliefs, rites, power, meaningful objects, making up that “socially available system of significance” for the guidance of outward behavior and the order of subjective life; it claims to be experience itself. And so, in a sense, it is.⁵⁶

Ellen’s statement contains important implications for the conceptualization of Islam which he does not himself fully develop. The first point to be drawn is similar to that made by Bowen, above, when he drew our attention to “the

⁵⁵ These range from the relatively tame (such as the story of a guest citing verses of the Qur'ān that contain references to numbers in the sequence one to ten so as to induce incrementally a serving of sweetmeats from his host; see the tenth-/eleventh-century jokebook by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *The Art of Party-Crashing in Medieval Iraq* (translated by Emily Selove), Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012, 81–84) to the downright lewd (see the use of Qur'anic verses in *double entendre* in a tale about buggery in Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad al-Tifāshī, *Nuzhat al-albāb fi-mā lā yūjad fi al-kitāb* (edited by Jamāl Jum'ah), London: Riyād al-Rayyis, 1992, 176; the title of this thirteenth-century book, which translates as *A Promenade for Hearts through That Which Is Not Found in Writing*, foreshadows that of the famous Woody Allen movie, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex But Were Afraid to Ask*). On the subject in general, see Geert Jan van Gelder, “Forbidden Firebrands: Frivolous *Iqtibās* (Quotations from the Qur'an) According to Medieval Arabic Critics,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 20–21 (2002–2003) 3–14.

⁵⁶ Roy F. Ellen, “Social Theory, Ethnography and the Understanding of Practical Islam in South-East Asia,” in M. B. Hooker (editor), *Islam in South-East Asia*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983, 50–91, at 86–87.

centrality of speech events; the cultural importance of commentary on those events; and the heterogeneous, ‘dispersive’ quality of religious discourse . . . *dispersive* in that they cannot be resolved into a single set of symbols”; namely, that Islam is irrepressibly heterogeneous and flexible, as well as discursively and praxially diffuse.

My point in presenting throughout this book instances of Muslims making meaning for themselves in terms of Islam in all variety of circumstances and in what are, for us, not the usual places, has been to show that so socially, discursively and praxially heterogeneous, flexible, and diffuse/dispersive is Islam, that Islam becomes *idiom*—that is to say, *Islam is a shared language by and in which people express themselves so as to communicate meaningfully* in all their variety. And, by fact of being *idiom*—that is, by fact of being *a means by and language in which people give meaning to experience in the self, and communicate that meaning to each other*—Islam stakes an experiential claim to being *more than idiom*: it becomes, “in a sense,” *the reality of the experience itself*⁵⁷ I would argue that the “sense” and degree in which Islam is the reality of an experience is the sense and degree in which *it is the means by which an experience is given meaning, as well as the meaning which the experience is given by that means*. Islam is, in other words, *both means and meaning*. *Islam is thus located in the nexus, the relationship, the field and the process of engagement with and between the source of meaning, the mode of production of meaning from the source, and the end-product of meaning*—howsoever this may be formulated and expressed in discourse and practice.

Now, it might be objected that *meaning* is too “high” or “rarefied” an element to posit as central to the constitution of Islam; that “meaning” is only appropriate to and constitutive of intellectual discourses and is not a valid means of conceptualizing the following by simple ordinary folk of received practices of custom or ritual, or adherence to received creed. The deficiency of this notion of meaning as confined to “high” or “intellectual” discourse has been illustrated quite superbly by Devin DeWeese in his discussion of the thirteenth-/fourteenth-century conversion to Islam of the Mongol Golden Horde:

. . . in adopting new behavioral and ritual forms, the community is acknowledging those new forms as more efficacious—and implicitly more *meaningful*—than inherited traditional forms . . . we must . . . avoid the “idealist” insistence that “meaning” be always or primarily in “intellec-

⁵⁷ “Saying Islam is idiom is not to reduce it to metaphor, to say it is *merely* a way of talking about other things. In so much as people believe in its reality, necessity and efficacy, it is clearly relevant to understanding social action,” Ellen, “Practical Islam in South-East Asia,” 87.

tual” terms . . . when Islamic norms of behavior, Islamic patterns of social discourse, and even external Islamic ritual forms offer the nomad or peasant greater “meaning” than indigenous ways in the practical economic and social spheres that are the focus of traditional religious life . . . we should recognize the profound and intimate sphere they have touched. Even in the case of “old” ways not entirely displaced by Islamic ones—the usual situation, after all, with some ritual patterns retained and others more consciously adapted to Islamic patterns—we should keep in mind the extent of what has been “let in” through “nominal” Islamization, recalling that these old pre-Islamic ways have survived alongside the deep and intimate aspects of life effected by Islamization (self-designation on personal and communal levels, ritual performance, in many cases conceptions of purity linked with the performance of ablation and methods of slaughtering animals, etc.). For what has been “let in” is . . . the introduction of new discursive reference points and new values and figures to evoke in social dialectic . . . To call oneself “Muslim” or by a name whose mention evokes recollection of an Islamizer, or of an entire “sacred history” or genealogy linked to Islamization, is no trivial matter. To adopt a name is to change one’s reality, and in this sense there is hardly a *deeper* “conversion” than a *nominal* one . . . such “conversion” amounts to, as implied in the typical Muslim term for the spread of Islam, an *opening*: Islamic rule (and identity) is established, and the observance of external forms is facilitated, thus “opening the way” for the Islamization of hearts . . . From the Muslim perspective, again, there is nothing inherently base in conversion to Islam for economic or even political benefit: such conversion offers the same potential for effecting an “opening” of hearts as does the “purely nominal” conversion, and from the early days of Islam the promise of participating in the material benefits enjoyed by and ensured by the Muslim community *by joining it* was recognized as a legitimate and in no way disreputable inducement to the change of status involved in “conversion” . . . it seems reasonable to pay more attention to what the *change* (in status, in name, in patterns of social and religious ritual) amounts to *from the perspective of the person or community that underwent the change* . . . in traditional Inner Asian religion, one of the chief, if not the preeminent, purposes of the sphere of activity that we would label “religious” is precisely to promote “life”: that is, to protect health and the survival of the community, to ensure material well-being and prosperity, to fructify herds and fields, to render “manufactured” craft objects effective and productive . . . to ensure the community’s life and prosperity in relation to other peoples, that is,

through warfare, diplomacy, and trade. In all cases one does not . . . employ “religious” concepts or practices to escape or downplay these fundamentally human aims, but to negotiate them . . . so to find that a particular individual or ruler or community has decided that the value system and complex of rites which the society in question has long recognized as efficacious for upholding life . . . is after all no more useful or effective than “the way of the Muslims,” or is even less powerful, is to admit a transformation of enormous import, precisely because of its “banality” . . . what Islam is sought for, or adopted for, is the same thing sought from the “old” tradition.⁵⁸

To restate DeWeese’s point in slightly different terms: when an illiterate nomadic tribe “converts” to Islam, both the community and the individuals who comprise it necessarily take on and in to themselves a complex of meaning(s). Both community and individuals are, in that measure, reconstituted in terms of that complex of meanings—that is to say, they are reconstituted *in terms of Islam*. Islam is thus taken on by community and individuals with and *as meaning; meaning and the meaningful being that truth which is of consequence to the subject engaging (in) it.*

Meaning/Islam, or meaning made in terms of Islam, or meaning as Islam, is a particular *consequential truth*. That which holds no meaning for someone is of no consequence for him/her; whereas that which *is* meaningful for someone has consequences for him, for his or her Self, including consequences of identity (whether and how one takes that meaning for and into oneself), of valorization (does that meaning posit a positive or negative or neutral or contradictory value for oneself?), of location (where does one stand vis-à-vis that meaning, and how does that act of location vis-à-vis meaning affect one’s other acts of location vis-à-vis meaning?), and of action (what does one do as a result of that meaning and why does one do it?). The meanings that we take on, whether by our own hermeneutical activity, or by the acceptance of the activity of others, themselves serve as a means by which further to engage other things in order, in turn, to reckon their meaning. Meaning/Islam, or meaning made in terms of Islam, or meaning as Islam, is thus itself a means by which to constitute things and by which to relate things to each other; Islam is points, terms and frames of reference; it is the components of a complex of relationality by which an actor or subject orients and constitutes his or her Self in and by an environment full of other things; it is

⁵⁸ Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, 54–59.

a means of ordering the world by which the Self is also ordered. To take or make meaning in terms of Islam is thus precisely to make oneself meaningful in terms of Islam and to discourse and act meaningfully in terms of Islam. To take or make meaning in terms of Islam is also, however, to enter into a discourse of meaning and action that is *constitutive of Islam*: by speaking and acting in engagement with that field of meaning, the actor is not only making himself, but is also making the field of meaning: he is both making Self and making Islam.

It might be helpful to illustrate this further by way of developing Muhammad Qasim Zaman's answers to the questions "What did the Muslim citizen of the classical Islamic world mean by Islam? In what sense was it operative in his life?"⁵⁹ Zaman pursues this inquiry through a study of "the dynamics underlying revolt, rebellion, social protest and revolution in early Islam,"⁶⁰ in which he looks in particular at the Khawārij, a refractory movement of first- and second-century Muslims who not only took a somewhat narrow view of what constituted the bounds of Islam, but who further took it upon themselves to fight any- and all-comers who did not adhere to their view. Zaman also posits (but does not directly address) "two problems, related to each other and to our basic question . . . first, why did men convert to Islam; and second why (i.e. for what reasons) did they fight for it . . . in the interest of what they perceived Islam to be[?]"⁶¹ Zaman's conclusion is that "Islam meant the way in which a particular people reacted to the imperatives of a particular situation, so it was the name of a system only *after*."⁶² Thus, "Islam means the way in which people react . . . fundamental in this context is the conviction that salvation depends on this reaction."⁶³ Zaman transposes this conclusion to the modern context of the anti-Ahmadī agitation in Pakistan in 1953, which was precisely an agitation over the questions of "What is Islam?"/ "Who is a Muslim?" in which the Jamā'at-i Islāmī movement led by Sayyid Abū-l-'Alā Mawdūdī (1903–1979) mobilized their supporters among the urban masses of the Punjab in often violent demonstrations aimed at pressuring the government into declaring the Ahmadis non-Muslims:

This, then, is the nature of Muslim commitment to religion: a commitment founded on a "conviction for which" as the Indian poet-philosopher

⁵⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Relevance of Religion and the Response to It: A Study of Religious Perceptions in Early Islam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd series, 2 (1988) 265–287, at 265.

⁶⁰ Zaman, "The Relevance of Religion and the Response to It," 265.

⁶¹ Zaman, "The Relevance of Religion and the Response to It," 265 footnote 1.

⁶² Zaman, "The Relevance of Religion and the Response to It," 286 (italics mine).

⁶³ Zaman, "The Relevance of Religion and the Response to It," 286.

Sir Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) said, “even the least enlightened man among us can easily lay down his life.” But how would this commitment be defined? Does the Muslim who is prepared to lay down his life know what Islam means? One of the conclusions of the *Inquiry Report* quoted above was “no two ‘ulamā’ . . . agreed . . . as to the definition of a Muslim.” This is important, but in this context, irrelevant. For the important thing is that the Muslim participant in a particular movement should know what *he means* by Islam. To him, therefore, Islam means the way he would react . . . the way he reacts . . . is what he means by Islam.⁶⁴

My point is that what is particularly instructive in such contexts where communities are, through conflict, being constituted and distinguished from each other in terms of Islam is that the “salvation” which the protagonists deem here to be at stake is understood by them to depend on the *constitution of their own Self in terms of the constitution of Islam itSelf*. In other words, their actions are actions of *definition* simultaneously constitutive both *by Islam of these persons* and *by these persons of Islam*. In the terms that I am putting forward, the *reactions* of “even the least enlightened” Muslim reacting *as (what he perceives to be) a Muslim* to a given definitional circumstance are his answers (no matter how limited his education) to what he perceives to be a given definitional question: these reactions/answers are a *consequence* and *enactment* of his notion of the *meaning of Islam*—it is *meaningful action constructive and constitutive of the Self and of Islam*. It is my further point that while such circumstances of commitment to lay down one’s life (or the lives of others) for one’s notion of the meaning of Islam are an especially dramatic instance of definitional action, it is emphatically not the case that actions constructive and constitutive of the Self and Islam take place only as commitment *in extremis*. Constructing, defining, and constituting Self and Islam takes place constantly and variously in a *quotidian* host of often contradictory actions—philosophical discourse, bodily experience, prayer (*salāt*), legal adjudication, poetic speech, disputation, artistic expression, political action, ritual, humour, *etcetera*—that *invest* the Self and Islam in a mutually-productive relationship; that *commit*, in some way, Islam and the Self to each other.

This component of a *commitment of the Self* to a meaning or value that is ultimately construed, negotiated and experienced by and in the Self as *Islam* is at once one of the most crucial and most analytically elusive elements in

⁶⁴ Zaman, “The Relevance of Religion and the Response to It,” 287. The *Inquiry Report* is the famous “Munir Report” named after its primary author, Justice M. Munir (his co-author was Justice M. R. Kayani), issued as the *Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953*, Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1954.

the constitution of human and historical Islam. In an essay entitled “What Is a Muslim?” which inquires into “what sort of animal any particular fundamental commitment is, what its origins are and what particular role or function it has in a person’s or community’s moral-psychological economy,” the philosopher, Akeel Bilgrami, has insightfully proposed that “a way to expound this theoretical connection . . . between a person’s fundamental commitments and the idea of the authentic self . . . is to look to the sorts of effects brought on a person by his abandoning—or the prospect of abandoning—such commitments.”⁶⁵ Bilgrami’s stratagem for locating and conceptualizing *commitment* to Islam—that of looking to what the *consequence* for a person is of their ceasing to act in terms of what they perceive to be Islam—is effectively the mirror-image of Zaman’s emphasis on locating the meaning of Islam to a person in his or her *reaction* to definitional circumstances (and is all the more striking given that Bilgrami is concerned with how to locate the commitment, not of Zaman’s Khārijī militants and Jama‘ati agitants, but of what he calls—somewhat unfortunately—“moderate Muslims” who “are conflicted, given their opposition to antisecular absolutist forces . . . and their fundamental commitment to a religion whose Book speaks with detailed pretensions to the issue of the law and the state”).⁶⁶

These two answers serve effectively to bookend my emphasis on conceptualizing Islam as *means and meaning*: a truth which is of *consequence* to and for the *subject* engaging (in) it. In sum, then, all action and discourse that is carried out in terms of the identifying relation between Self and Islam, that makes meaning for both Self and Islam, is constitutive of both Self and Islam. This fundamental dynamic of the mutually-constructing relationship be-

⁶⁵ Akeel Bilgrami, “What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992) 821–842, at 827.

⁶⁶ Bilgrami, “What is a Muslim?” 829. It is unfortunate that the genuine insights in Bilgrami’s article are somewhat undermined by his division of Muslims into the poorly designated categories of “moderates” and “absolutists” according to their respective commitment to secularism and *sharia* (his agenda is to help moderate Muslims overcome the above-stated predicament of being “conflicted, given their opposition to antisecular absolutist forces in their countries and their fundamental commitment to a religion whose Book speaks with detailed pretension to issues of the law and of state”), as well as by a paucity of references to and engagements with the historical content of the discourses of Muslims (whose absence is especially felt relative to the numerous references to and engagements with Western philosophers). For example, Bilgrami seems unaware that his proposed solution to the problem, namely to abandon the legislatively-oriented Medinese verses of the Qur’ān in favour of the more “spiritual” Meccan verses, was already put forward by the prominent Sudanese reformer Mahmūd Muḥammad Tāhā, who was executed for his pains in 1985; see Mahmūd Muḥammad Tāhā, *al-Risālah al-Thāniyah min al-Islām*, Omdurman: al-Ḥizb al-Jumhūrī, 1967; see the English translation, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The Second Message of Islam* (translated by Abdullahi Ahmed al-Na’im), Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987.

tween the individual and collective human Self, on the one side, and Islam, on the other, is at once one of the most crucial and the most neglected elements for the conceptualization of human and historical Islam.⁶⁷ What is required is a conceptualization of Islam that cuts to the quick of how it is that *Muslims make Islam just as Islam makes Muslims* in all the evident complexity and contradiction of this process and engagement.



In the foregoing, I have repeatedly emphasized the central place of the Self and of explorative meaning-making by the Self for the conceptualization of human and historical Islam. However, as is the case with other elements that I have posited as centrally constitutive of Islam, such as contradiction, diffusion and meaning-making, the idea of the Self is, perhaps, not among those that first comes to mind when people think of Islam in the received and prevailing conceptualizations. Some will likely be skeptical of what might appear to be the positing as central to human and historical Islam of what are often regarded as a distinctly (and definitively) *modern* (and Western) set of human existential concerns; namely, the *cogito ergo sum* questions of self-awareness, self-consciousness, self-knowledge, personhood, the individual and individuality, mind-body, agency, identity, subjectivity, self-determination, *etcetera*, which informed and gave rise to the broader social pre-occupations of modern (Western/-ized) man with questions about the meaning and constitution of the Self.⁶⁸ But the fact of the matter is that questions about the meaning and

⁶⁷ It does not help when the relationship is posited as a unilateral one: “It is not Islam that shapes Muslim, but rather Muslims who, through discourses, practices, beliefs and actions, shape Islam in different times and spaces.” Gabrielle Marranci, “Sociology and Anthropology of Islam: A Critical Debate,” in Bryan S. Turner (editor), *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 364–387, at 368. I disagree in the simplest terms: whether one is born a Muslim or adopts Islam, one is being shaped by discourses, practices, beliefs, and actions that are already present as Islam.

⁶⁸ For example, Francis Robinson, in a typically insightful synthesis, has argued for the crucial role played in the “growing influence of Western civilization with its ideas of individualism, personal fulfillment, and the rights of man—with its endorsement of earthly existence and earthly pleasures, and its celebration of individual lives, great and small” in the development of “self-instrumentality, the idea of the individual human being as the active, creative, agent on the earth; self-affirmation, the autonomy of the individual; to which is connected the affirmation of the ordinary things of the self, the affirmation of ordinary life, and, finally, the growth of self-consciousness and reflection” among the Muslims of South Asia; Francis Robinson, “Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia Since 1800,” in Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, 105–121, at 107 and 112. While not seeking at all to deny that the exposure to Western civilization had an important impact on the notion of self among modern Muslims, I am arguing here that all these elements that Robin-

constitution of Self have been central to the discourses of Muslims from very early in history—and that this pre-occupation with questions of Self has arisen directly from the Muslim predicament of making meaning by engagement with the phenomenon of Revelation. Questions about whether and how a person can access the Truth of Revelation (such as in debates over whether Prophecy is a phenomenon unique to those selected for it, or one in which other persons can somehow, by aptitude and effort, partake), about the authority of human reason as a means of knowing (debates over the status of knowledge by ‘*aql*/reason, versus *naql*/transmission), about the validity of (altered states of) human consciousness as a means of knowing (i.e., debates over Sufism), about the constitution of human agency and responsibility (debates over predestination and freewill, or *qada’* and *qadar*), are all ultimately questions about the nature and constitution and experience and capacity of the individual Self relative to the Truth of Revelation. In other words, the Muslim predicament of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation is directly productive of a trajectory of Self-interrogation, Self-contemplation, Self-affirmation, Self-articulation, and Self-action as means to meaning in terms of Islam.

I venture that most of us are quite unaware that a *cogito* moment of a different sort took place very early in Islamic history with Ibn Sinā’s seminal thought-experiment of the “Floating Man,” by which the Muslim philosopher sought to demonstrate that “the existence of the soul is a distinct identity from the body . . . which he [the person] knows through his self-consciousness”:

One of us must suppose that he was just created at a stroke, fully developed and perfectly formed but with his vision shrouded from perceiving all objects—created floating in the air out in space, not buffeted by any perceptible current of the air that supports him, his limbs separated and kept out of contact with one another, so that they do not feel each other. Then let the subject consider whether he would affirm the existence of his own self. There is no doubt that he would affirm his own existence, although not affirming the reality of any of his limbs or inner organs, his

son here posits as coming newly to Muslims from the West in the nineteenth century—individualism, personal fulfillment, the rights of man, the endorsement of earthly existence and earthly pleasures, the celebration of individual lives, great and small, self-instrumentality, self-affirmation, affirmation of ordinary life, self-consciousness, and reflection—were amply present in pre-modern societies of Muslims where they constituted fundamental components of notions of Self, and were, accordingly, voiced in various genres and registers of literary self-expression (some instances of which have been seen in this study). As such, when seeking to understand the constitution of the Self in societies of modern Muslims, we must look not only to the impact of the modern West, but also to the Islamic past.

bowels, or heart or brain, or any external thing. Indeed he would affirm the existence of this self of his while not affirming that it had any length, breadth or depth . . . Thus the self, whose existence he affirmed, is his distinctive identity, although not identical with his body and his organs, whose existence he did not affirm. Accordingly, one who directs his thoughts to this consideration has a means of affirming the existence of the soul as something distinct from the body, indeed, as something quite other than the body, something which he knows through his own self-consciousness, even if he had overlooked it and needs to be alerted to it.⁶⁹

Ibn Sīnā is here identifying the individual person's intellectual awareness of his *self*—what he calls the “identity [*huwiyyah*] between the one aware and the thing of which there is awareness”⁷⁰—as the *fundamental existential act* (*huwiyyah* literally means “he-ness” or “it-ness”): “Our awareness of ourselves is our existence itself.”⁷¹ But the self-consciousness of the Floating Man is only the most basic and primitive form of self-knowledge, for Ibn Sīnā also notes above that the human being can “overlook . . . his own self-consciousness” and may “need to be alerted to it”—the implication being that consciousness of the self is an *action or process of knowing*, and that not every person knows himself as he might. The ultimate act of self-knowing, “the perfection proper to the rational soul,” says Ibn Sīnā, is for the “rational soul to become an intelligible world in which there is impressed the form of the cosmos and the cosmos' intelligible order . . . until the entire configuration of existence is completely contained within the soul itself.”⁷² For Ibn Sīnā, a

⁶⁹ This famous passage has been translated and analyzed several times: this is the elegant rendering by Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006, at 155–156. Other iterations of this thought-experiment by Ibn Sīnā are presented in Michael F. Marmura, “Avicenna’s Flying Man in Context,” *The Monist* 69 (1986) 383–395. For the Arabic text, see Ibn Sīnā, *Avicenna’s De Anima (Arabic Text), Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifa’* (edited by Fazlur Rahman), London: Oxford University Press, 1959, 16. For a comparison between Descartes and Ibn Sīnā, see Thérèse-Anne Druart, “The Soul and Body Problem: Avicenna and Descartes,” in Thérèse-Anne Druart, *Arabic Philosophy and the West: Continuity and Interaction*, Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1988, 27–49.

⁷⁰ *huwiyyah bayna al-shā’ir wa al-mash’ūr bi-hi*, Abū ‘Ali Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta’liqāt* (edited by Sayyid Ḥusayn Mūsāviyān), Tehran: Mu’assasah-’i Pizhūhishī-yi Hikmat va Falsafah-’i Īrān, 1391 sh [2012], 440, and 482; cited by Deborah L. Black, “Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing that One Knows,” in Shahid Rahman, Tony Street, and Hassan Tahiri (editors), *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition: Science, Logic, Epistemology and their Interactions*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2009, 63–87, at 69.

⁷¹ *shu’ūru-nā bi-dhāti-nā huwa nafs wujūdi-nā*, Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta’liqāt*, 482, cited by Black, “Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing that One Knows,” 66.

⁷² *inna al-nafs al-nātiqah kamalu-ha al-khaṣṣ bi-hā an taṣīra ‘alamān ‘aqliyyān murtasaman fi-hā šūrat al-kull wa al-niżām al-ma’qūl fī al-kull . . . ḥattā tastawṣī fī naṣī-hā hay’at al-wujūd*

Prophet is precisely such a person who grasps by his prodigious insight (*hads*) the intelligible order of the universe and, having domesticated this order within himself, is able to reconfigure it for intelligible communication to those not independently capable of such knowing.

Ibn Sīnā's positing of the centrality of self-knowledge to existence was taken up further by al-Suhrawardī, the formulator of the Illuminationist paradigm that, we have noted in Chapter 1, became pervasive in the thought of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex.

That by which you are you is nothing other than a thing that perceives its own self: it is your I-ness . . . (Self-)perceivingness, then, is neither an attribute nor something additional (to you) . . . Thingness is also not something additional to awareness for it is “the evident to itself by itself” . . . thus, it is light unto itself, and is pure light . . . Light is that which is manifest in the reality of its self that, by its self, makes another manifest . . . You should not say, “My I-ness is a thing whose concomitant is manifestation” . . . rather, it is it-self manifestation and it-self luminosity . . . every one that perceives its self is pure light, and every light pure light manifests to itself and perceives itself.⁷³

Fazlur Rahman summed this up neatly when he said of the Illuminationist philosophy: “All knowledge is a kind of illumination and involves light; self-awareness is therefore self-luminousness . . . self-awareness is regarded as the constitutive element of being.”⁷⁴ Thus, when, in seventeenth-century Istanbul, the Ottoman intellectual, Kātib Çelebī (1609–1657), called himself an “Illuminationist by disposition,”⁷⁵ he was saying precisely that he—and those like him—regarded self-awareness as the constitutive element of being. The circulation of Suhrawardī’s ideas in the society in which Kātib Çelebī lived

kulla-hu, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 350 (compare the respective translations by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 350; and of Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 219).

⁷³ mā anta bi-hi anta illa shay'an mudrikan li-dhāti-hā . . . fa-al-mudriyyah idhan laysat bi-sifatīn wa lā amr zā'id . . . al-shay'iyyah laysat bi-zā'idatin aydan 'alā fa-huwa al-zāhir bi-hafsi-hi li-nafsi-hi . . . fa-huwa nūrūn li-nafsi-hi fa-yakūn nūrān mahdān . . . al-nūr huwa al-zāhir fi haqiqat nafsi-hi al-muzhir li-ghayri-hi bi-dhāti-hi . . . laysa la-ka an taqūla aniyat-i shay' yalzamu-hu al-zuhūr . . . bal hiya nafs al-zuhūr . . . wa kullu man adraka dhāta-hu fa-huwa nūr mahd wa kullu nūr mahd zāhir li-dhāti-hi wa mudrik li-dhāti-hi, Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination* [Hikmat al-ishrāq] (edited and translated by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai). Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999, 80–82 (compare the translation by Walbridge and Ziai, and that by Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi*, 17–18).

⁷⁴ Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi*, 18.

⁷⁵ Adivar, *Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim*, 118.

and exchanged ideas is evidenced by the numerous copies of Suhrawardi's works preserved today in the manuscript libraries of Istanbul (the library of the Sultan Bāyezid II, alone, owned ten copies of the *Hikmat al-ishrāq* and commentaries thereon).⁷⁶

Lest one think that this is just so much obscure existentialist philosophy going on in the mind of Ibn Sīnā and of Suhrawardī, the fact is that what we have here is a seed of what was to become one of the major idiomatic ideas and thoroughgoing concerns in the history of societies of Muslims: namely the notion of the perfectibility of the human being as *cosmic knower* such that, by his knowledge, that individual person comprises in himself the Truth and Meaning of the universe. This is, of course, the famous anthropocosmic/cosmoanthropic concept of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) elaborated by Ibn ‘Arabī and, subsequently, by ‘Aziz-i Nasafī (fl. 1273) and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jilī (1366–1424). The Perfect Man comprises in his *self* the Truth and Meaning in the universe such that his act of self-knowledge is knowledge of the very Truth and Meaning of the universe: the Perfect Man is the perfect *self* and the perfect *knower*, his perfect knowledge is precisely perfect *self-knowledge*. Neither is *al-insān al-kāmil* merely an impossible theoretical ideal—rather, Perfect Men are real living and breathing persons in society where they stand at the head of the ranks of a social hierarchy of self-knowers (Ibn ‘Arabī, for example, was in no doubt that he himself was *al-insān al-kāmil*, and held the same opinion of, among others, our above-mentioned Divine interlocutor, Bāyazid al-Bistāmī).⁷⁷

Thus, the philosophers' identification of the fundamental importance of self-knowledge resounds fully with the goal of the Sufi project which is to attain to just such a level of *cosmic* or *divine self-knowledge*—as is summed up in the famous Hadith that has served as a Sufi motto: “Whoso knows his self knoweth his Lord [*man ‘arafa nafsa-hu fa-qad ‘arafa rabba-hu*].” My point, though, is that this *sense of the relationship between self and meaning* is not a rarefied conceit confined to closed social circles of Sufis and philosophers, but rather a widespread and normal expression and condition of the human and historical fact and experience of being Muslim down the centuries. We thus should not be at all surprised to find that the seventeenth-century leader of the Khaṭak tribe of Pashtūns, Khwushhāl Khān Khaṭak (1613–1689), begins his thoroughly down-to-earth manual for virtuous living entitled *Dastārnāmah*

⁷⁶ See al-‘Āṭifi, *Daftar al-kutub*, 355. See also İlhan Kutluer, “*Hikmetü'l İsrāk*,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İSAM, 1988–2013, 17:521–524; Ritter, “Die vier Suhrawardi. Ihre Werke in Stambuler Handschriften”; and Kuşpinar, *Ismā‘il Ankarāvī on the Illuminative Philosophy*.

⁷⁷ See Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid-Din Ibnu'l 'Arabī*, 78.

(*Book of the Turban*), which he authored in Pashtō “as instruction and advice for my children, brothers, friends and lovers,”⁷⁸ with a chapter entitled “The First Quality: Self-Knowledge [*jān pīzhandgalvī*],” which sets forth by immediately citing the Hadith, “Whoso knows himself knoweth his Lord,” followed by a Pashtō translation and gloss in simple rhyme:

He who has come to know his self—he has come to know God;
He who does not know his self does not know God.⁷⁹

Khwushhāl Khān’s opening statement indicates not only the extent to which the philosophical-Sufi amalgam pervades and grounds the *paideia* of the societies of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, but also how, in consequence thereof, *self-knowledge* was high on the agenda of Muslims acting as Muslims. The full cognizance of the challenges posed to the Muslim individual by engagement in this *exploratory* undertaking is straightforwardly presented by the anonymous seventeenth-century author of “one of the most important single documents in the history of the development of Sufi thought in the Indonesian countries,”⁸⁰ a didactic poem in Javanese entitled *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* (itself an adaptation and elaboration of the Arabic work of the same title by the Gujarātī author, Muḥammad al-Burhānpūrī [d. 1620]), who said in introducing his audience of adepts to the idea of self-knowledge:

This is difficult and dangerous,
perilous and hard to accept
except with guidance.
The Prophet of God declares:
“Whosoever knows his self
thereupon knows his Lord”
... if you do not know your self
you cannot know God.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Khwushhāl Khān Khatak, *Dastārnāmah*, Kabul: Pashtō Tōlānah, 1966, 137.

⁷⁹ *kīh dē shinākhat voshō jān / shinākhat dē voshō da subhān // kih shinākhat nishtah jān / shinākhat dē nishtah da subhān*, Khwushhāl Khān Khatak, *Dastārnāmah*, 9.

⁸⁰ A. H. Johns, *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1965, 5. The work itself is written in Javanese, but the title is in Arabic: *al-Tuḥfah al-mursalah ilā rūḥ al-nabī*.

⁸¹ *Dèn kena dèra nampani / sing tèku éwuḥ apringga / arusit èwuḥ tampané / anging kawawan hidayat / Nabiyyullah ngandika / sing sapa wruh dirinpun / mengko wruh ing Pangéran / ... jén tan wruh ing sarirané / nora weruh ing Pangéran*, Johns, *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*, 75. The translation is Johns’.

My point here is to emphasize this conceptualization in history by Muslims of being Muslim (that is, of human and historical Islam) as the “difficult and dangerous” *exploration* of meaning for the Self—a conceptualization all too often lost in the habitual privileging of *prescriptive* discourses over *explorative* discourses of meaning—and thus to emphasize the importance of paying due attention, when thinking about Islam or when using the word Islamic, to the larger significance to societies of Muslims of such explorative self-statements as the following well-known Persian verses of Rūmī:

What doing, O Muslims? For, I do not know myself.
 I am neither Christian nor Jew; nor Zoroastrian nor Muslim.
 Nor Eastern nor I am Western; nor of land, nor of the ocean;
 Nor was I mined from nature, nor do I circle with the heavens . . .
 I am not of India, nor of China, nor of Bulgar, nor of Saqsīn,
 I am not of the kingdom of the two Iraqs, nor from the dust of Khurasan.
 My place is the no-place, my sign is the no-sign;
 Neither is it body, nor is it soul, for I am of the life-soul of the Beloved!
 I have put away from my Self all Two-ness; as One have I seen the Two
 Worlds:
 Seek I One! Know I One! See I One! Say I One!⁸²

Rūmī—in these widely-known and widely-recited verses—is here doing nothing if not making a statement of self-exploration, self-consciousness, self-constitution, self-awareness, self-identity, *etcetera* in terms of the fundamental Qur’ānic principle of Divine Unicity (*tawhīd*). He is trying to express here the location of his Self in a domain and condition beyond the various domains and conditions by which a person usually takes his bearings, and with which a person usually identifies his or her self—and where the Two Worlds, Seen and Unseen are *seen* as One (*yakī dīdam dū ‘ālam rā*). And, yes, Rūmī does say, “I am not a Muslim”; but the whole point here is that his Muslim audience (to whom he addresses himself) do not take him at his literal word, but rather understand him to mean something beyond the word—and thus to be speaking about the Meaning of Existence from someplace in *himself* that is beyond

⁸² chih tadbīr ay musalmānān kih man khwud rā namidānam / nah tarsā nah yahūdam man nah gabram nah musalmānām / nah sharqiyam nah gharbiyyam nah barriyam nah bahriyyam / nah az kān-i ṭabīyyam nah az aflāk-i gardānam . . . nah az hindam nah az chinam nah az bulghār o saqsīnam / nah az mulk-i ‘iraqaynam nah az khāk-i khurāsānam / makānam lā makān bāshad nishānam bī-nishān bāshad / nah tan bāshad nah jān bāshad kih man az jān-i jānānam / dū‘i az khwud ba-dūr kardam yakī dīdam dū ‘ālam rā / yakī jūyam yakī dānam yakī bīnam yakī khwānam; cited in Reynold A. Nicholson, *Selected Poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898, 125–127 (compare Nicholson’s translation).

the word. Had Rūmī's statement "I am not a Muslim" been taken literally he would not have been widely venerated as "Our Master and Sovereign [Mawlānā Khudāvandigār]," and as one of the most profound interpreters of the Qur'ān (his great poem, the *Masnavī-yi Ma'navī*, or *Doublets of Meaning*, is universally known as the "Qur'ān in the Persian tongue"), nor would the Sufi order he founded have become the one most singled-out for public patronage by those imperial upholders of Sunnī Ḥanafī truth and order, the Ottoman dynasty. When Rūmī says, "I am not a Muslim," he is understood by Muslims to be saying this *as a Muslim*—indeed, as an *exemplary* Muslim. Thus, to say that in these lines Rūmī, "by giving voice to a kind of antinomianism . . . challenged the very foundations of religious identity,"⁸³ misses the more important half of the point. Rather, what Rūmī is asserting—indeed, celebrating—here is the finding and founding of his identity as a Muslim by his knowledge of the Truth of the Unseen: he is *making* the very foundations of Muslim identity. And, of course, when Rūmī says that he does not know himself, his audience understands perfectly well that he is, in fact, telling them that, by means of knowing his relationship to all of existence, he knows himself *perfectly* well!

Neither is Rūmī a unique case: far from it! As a further example of exploratory self-statement in terms of Islam one may cite the famous Panjābī verses of the celebrated Bullhē Shāh (1680–1758) of Kasūr, familiar to all speakers of that language (who today number about 140 million souls)—and which may well have been inspired by Rūmī's Persian poem quoted above:

Bullhā! What do I know: Who am I?
 I am not the Believer in the mosque!
 Nor am I in Infidel rituals!
 Nor am I pure amongst the impure!
 Nor am I Moses, nor am I Pharaoh!
 Bullhā! What do I know: Who am I?
 I am not in the books of Veda!
 Nor am I in bhang, nor in wine!
 Nor am I in the passion-ruined *rind*!⁸⁴
 Nor am I in wakefulness, nor in slumber!
 Bullhā! What do I know: Who am I?
 I am not in joy, nor am I in sorrow!
 I am not in sin, nor am I in piety!

⁸³ Berkey, "Islam," 57.

⁸⁴ On *rind*, see footnote 94 in Chapter 1.

Nor am I am of water, nor am I of dust!
 Nor am I fire, nor am I air!
 Bullhā! What do I know: Who am I?
 I am not an Arab, nor of Lāhōr!
 Nor I am an Indian from the city of Nāgōr!
 Nor a Hindu, nor a Turk from Pashōr!
 Nor a dweller of Nadawn!
 Bullhā! What do I know: Who am I?
 I have not found the secret of the Way!
 Nor did Adam and Eve beget me!
 Nor did I even name myself!
 Nor am I rest, nor am I motion!
 Bullhā! What do I know: Who am I?
 First and Last: I know my Self!
 No other do I recognize!
 None is wiser than “I”!
 Bullhā! Who is that standing there?⁸⁵
 Bullhā! What do I know: Who am I?⁸⁶

The full exegesis of the meanings in this poem is a task that, regrettably, lies beyond the scope of the present work, though some local matters might be of help to readers as they read the poem a second time. The reference to Moses and Pharoah is Qur’anic—and is, as well, a major theme of Rūmī’s *Masnavī*; the word I have translated as “Way” is *mazhab* (i.e., *madhab*); when Bullhē

⁸⁵ Another recension of this line is “Who is that ‘Bullhē Shāh’ standing there? [Bullhē Shāh kharā hay kawn].”

⁸⁶ Bullhā kih jānāñ mayñ kawn // nah mayñ mōmin vich masit āñ / nah mayñ vich kufar dī rīt āñ / nah mayñ pākāñ vich palit āñ / nah mayñ Mūsā nah Fir’awn // Bullhā kih jānāñ mayñ kawn // nah mayñ andar bēd kitābāñ / nah vich bhangāñ nah sharābāñ / nah vich rindāñ mast kharābāñ / nah vich jāgan nah vich sawn // Bullhā kih jānāñ mayñ kawn // nah vich shādi nah ghamnākī / nah mayñ vich paliti pāki / nah mayñ ābi nah mayñ khākī / nah mayñ ātish nah mayñ pawn // Bullhā kih jānāñ mayñ kawn // nah mayñ ‘arabi nah lāhōri / nah mayñ hindī shahar nāgōri / nah hindū nah turak pashōri / nah mayñ rahandāh vich nadawn // Bullhā kih jānāñ mayñ kawn // nah mayñ bhit mazhab dā pāyā / nah mayñ Ādam Ḥavva jāyā / nah mayñ apnā nām dharāyā / nah vich baythan nah vich bhawn // Bullhā kih jānāñ mayñ kawn // avval ākhar āp nūñ jānāñ / nah ko’i dujā hōr paçhānāñ / mayñ tūñ hōr nah ko’i siyānā / Bullhā oh kharā hay kawn // Bullhā kih jānāñ mayñ kawn. In the absence of an authoritative edition of the poetry of Bullhē Shāh, I have used my own judgement to collate the versions of this *kāfi* (a Sufi lyric punctuated by a refrain) given, respectively, in Bullhē Shāh, *Kalām Bullhē Shāh* (edited by Muhammad Nazir Ahmad), Lahore: Packages, 1976, 17–18; Bullhē Shāh, *Kalām-i Bullhē Shāh* (*ma’ā Urdū tarjamah*) (edited by In’ām-ul-Ḥaqq Jāvēd and Amjad ‘Alī Bhaṭṭī), Lahore: ‘Aziz Pablikeshanz, 2004, 86–87; and Bullhē Shāh, *Kulliyāt Bullhē Shāh* (edited by Faqīr Muḥammad Faqīr), Lahore: al-Fayṣal, 2006, 82–83.

Shāh says, “Nor did I even name myself,” he is referring to the Qur’ān’s statement that God taught Adam the names of all things (see Qur’ān 2:31 al-Baqarah), the point being that he thus does not even know the original meaning of himself; and when he says that Adam and Eve did not beget him, his point is that he is not an *original* human being and thus does not have knowledge of the original human condition.⁸⁷ This poem (the huge circulation and continuing popular appeal of which may readily be gauged by a visit to YouTube) is precisely an exploration of the meaning and identity of the Self—as well as a normative statement of the necessity of self-knowing as a means to knowing Divine Truth. Again, while Bullhē Shāh says that he is not the Believer (*momin*) in the mosque, his expression is meaningful to his Muslim audience precisely as a self-statement in terms of Islam. For his Muslim audience Bullhē Shāh is a *Muslim meaning-maker*: he is someone who makes meaning for Muslims *as* Muslims—he makes meaning in terms of Islam. Were it not so, his tomb in Kasūr would not be today a site of constant devoted pilgrimage by Muslims, and of a great saint-day celebration at which his poems (including the one cited above) are continuously sung. It is not merely that Bullhē Shāh’s self-exploration is understood by Muslims as coherent with Islam; rather, the possibilities of meaning traversed by Bullhē Shāh’s explorative self-statement have been and are still taken by Muslims as a means by which to orient their own self-exploration for meaning in terms of Islam.

For us to respond to Rūmī and Bullhē Shāh by saying, “*But these are Sufi authors,*” would be precisely to impose upon societies of Muslims the sort of compartmentalization and mutual quarantining of discourses that does not represent the reality of human and historical Islam. Rather than seeking to *set aside* these authors in a discursive space to which they were not historically limited, we need to place them in the central discursive space which they occupied as a matter of historical fact, and to read them as what they were (and are): figures whose writings are of prodigious circulation and canonical status in the ears and mouths and hearts and minds of Muslims, who express and establish normative claims in regard to *What is Islam?* and whose claims enter into circulation and become available for engagement and meaning-making by Muslims. These poems are widely-recited manifestos for awareness and exploration of the Self as a means and locus of complex possibilities of meaning-making for Muslims in terms of Islam.

This is evident in the routinization of certain concepts in the discourses of Muslims, such as the idea of *tahqīq*, literally, “Real-ization” or “Truth-ization”—

⁸⁷ Pashōr is Peshawar; Nadawn is a town in the Panjab; Nāgōr is in Rajasthan.

broadly speaking, the involvement of the *self* and of the agency of the self in the ascertaining of Truth, whether by methods philosophical or Sufi or some admixture of both. The *muhaqqiq* is one who, through the exercise and involvement of the *agency of his person* in the process of knowing, comes to know things as they Real-ly are. Throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, practitioners of philosophy and philosophically-inflected thought used the term *tahqīq* to designate the process of a scholar carrying out original personal investigation of a given matter by the methods of rational syllogistic reasoning to establish the Real-Truth of the matter⁸⁸—or, as contemporary philosophers like to say, “*doing philosophy*.” Similarly, exponents of Sufi thought and practice used the term *tahqīq* to designate the process of a person carrying out original personal investigation of a given matter by the rigorous holistic exercise of the holistic capacities of existential knowing, by the imaginal-experiential knowledge of the individual mind-body. To the degree that these two projects amalgamated, so did the understanding of the operation of *tahqīq*. As William Chittick puts it, “*Tahqīq* aims at the discovery of the *haqq* within the seeker’s own intelligence.”⁸⁹

Perhaps nowhere is the notion of the involvement of the *Self of each and every person* in the continuum of the Revelation of Truth more present than in the idea enshrined in the canonical Hadith that “The good dream of a faithful person is one forty-sixth of prophecy.”⁹⁰ This notion expresses at the most quotidian—strictly speaking: nocturnal—level the concept of the potential direct revelatory accessibility of the Truth of the Unseen to each and every human being: that we are all partakers in the Revelatory process—that we are all fractional prophets (indeed, one definition of a Prophet [*nabi*] is that he is someone who receives Revelation while *awake*, thus setting him off from the rest of humanity who only receive Revelation while in the altered self-consciousness of sleep). It is this very logic that we have seen operative in the idea of the inspiration of the poet as a simulacrum of Divine Revelation—a concept summed up by the great Nizāmī (author of the foundational Majnūn-Laylā epic) who wrote, “Poetry is the mirror of the visible and the invisible . . . the curtain of mystery, the shadow of the Prophetic veil,” and who forth-

⁸⁸ On philosophical and scholastic *tahqīq*, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Floreescence of the Seventeenth Century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006) 263–281.

⁸⁹ On Sufi *tahqīq*, see Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, especially 45–47, and 118–121, the quotation is at 56.

⁹⁰ *Ru’yā al-mu’mīn juz’un min sittatin wa arba’ina juz’an min al-nubuwwah*; versions of this Hadith appear in all the canonical collections of Hadith, including al-Bukhārī, *Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 10:361, and Muslim, *Sahīḥ Muslim*, 7:53.

rightly proclaimed himself “Mirror of the Unseen.”⁹¹ And, if we turn from private poetic inspiration to public poetic performance, we find the social routinization of the involvement of self in meaning-making evident in the literary practice whereby the poet, in the final couplet of a *ghazal* (the *maqṭā*: literally, *terminus*) invokes *himself* by his poet’s name (*takhalluṣ*: literally, “self-summary”). In this way, the *routine* procedure of the performance of the prolific social discourse of the *ghazal* is that the poet “signs off” by speaking both to and of his *self*, and by speaking to his audience through an experience or sentiment of meaning or truth that is *statedly* from his own experience. And in this way every *ghazal* is, in its social performance, a re-iteration and rehearsal of the centrality of the self in meaning-making. And, sometimes, the “self-summary” of the *ghazal* is also directly about (the difficulties of) summarizing the *self*.

They ask, “Who is Ghālib?”

Someone tell me what I can tell them!⁹²

A signal instance of the focus on the Self as locus for the Truth and Meaning of Islam (in some ways the historical culmination of this idea) comes with the (re-)mobilization by the philosopher, poet, and reformer, Muḥammad Iqbāl, of the millennium-old Persian/Urdu concepts of *khwudī*, literally, “Self-ness” or “Self-hood,” and *bī-khwudī*, literally: “without-Self-ness” or “Self-less-ness,” as the seminal concepts for the (self-)creation of a new twentieth-century species of Muslim capable of meeting the challenges of modernity.⁹³ Iqbāl, who effectively sought to make of every Muslim a *muhaqqiq*/self-realizer of Truth, set out this agenda in two acclaimed Persian poems, *Secrets of Self-hood* (*Asrār-i khwudī*) and *Signs of Self-less-ness* (*Rumūz-i bī-khwudī*)—the one about the individual self, the other about the collective self—as well as in numerous oft-recited Urdu couplets, such as:

⁹¹ “So perfect is the magic of my speech / That I am called “The Mirror of the Unseen [*dar sihr-i sukhan chunān tamām* / *k-āyīnah-i ghayb gasht nāmām*.]” Ḥakīm Niẓāmī Ganjahvī, *Kulliyāt-i Nizāmī* (edited by Vahid Dastgirdī), Tehran: Ṭalāyeh, 1382 sh [2003], 1: *Laylī va Majnūn*, 40, line 571 (each poem is paginated separately) (compare the translation of Johann Christoph Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh: The ‘Licit Magic’ of the Arts in Medieval Islam*, New York: New York University Press, 1988, 53).

⁹² *pūchtē hayñ voḥ kih Ghālib kawn hay / kō̄i batlā'ō kih ham batlā'ēn kyā*, Ghālib, *Dīvān-i Ghālib*, 2:191.

⁹³ There are numerous studies on Iqbāl’s philosophy of Self-hood; see, for example, ‘Abd-ul-Mughnī, *Iqbāl kā nażariyah-i khwudī: Iqbāl kē niżām-i aṣkār kē ‘avāmil o ‘anāṣir kī tanqīdī tahshīḥ o tawzīḥ*, New Delhi: Maktabah-i Jāmi‘ah, 1990; Muḥammad ‘Usmān, *Iqbāl kā falsafah-i khwudī: bunyādī taṣāvvurāt*, Lahore: Maktabah-i Jadid, 1971.

This is the purpose of the revolutions of day and night –
That your Self may reveal itself to you.⁹⁴

When Self-hood is Self-observing, Self-constructing, and Self-possessing,
Even this is possible: that by death you will not die!⁹⁵

And, of course, the following couplet known by rote to every Pakistani schoolchild:

Raise your Self-hood so high that at each turn of fate,
God Himself should ask of man, “Tell: what would you dictate?”⁹⁶

To which a wag duly appended the cautionary *caveat*:

Iqbal said to “Raise your Self-hood high!”
But not quite so high that you’re left high and dry!⁹⁷

I have been trying to impress upon the reader that, in a conceptualization of Islam as theoretical object and analytical category that maps meaningfully onto the human and historical phenomenon of Islam, the idea of the Self as constituted by Muslims must occupy a central constitutive place. Our conceptualization of Islam should be such that when we think of Islam, we should concomitantly think of the meaningful exploration of the *self* with its associated components of self-awareness, of personhood, of identity, of the individual, of the collective, of the personality, of self-action. This is not something that our received conceptual habits allow us easily to do. Our received habits of conceptualizing Islam as discourses of prescription rather than as discourses of exploration have considerably obstructed us from recognizing the place of discourses of the Self as central to and constitutive of human and

⁹⁴ *yih hay maqṣad-i gardish-i rōzgār / kih tēri khwudī tujh pih hō āshkār*, Muhammad Iqbāl, “Sāqināmāh” in *Bāl-i Jibrīl*, 133, in Muhammad Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl* (Urdu), Lahore: Iqbāl Akādīmī, 1990, 437.

⁹⁵ *hō agar khwud-nigār o khwud-gār o khwud-gīr khwudī / yih bhī mumkin hay kih tū mawt sē bhī mar nah sakē*; Muhammad Iqbāl, “Hayāt-i abādī,” in *Žarb-i Kalim*, 43, in Muhammad Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl* (Urdu), Lahore: Iqbāl Akādīmī, 1990, 543.

⁹⁶ *khwudī kō kar buland itnā kih har taqdir sē pehlē / khudā bandē sē khwud pūchhē batā tērī razā kyā hay* Muhammad Iqbāl, *ghazal*, in *Bāl-i Jibrīl*, 60, in Muhammad Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl* (Urdu), 384.

⁹⁷ *Iqbāl nē kahā kih khwudī kō buland kar / par itnā nahūn kih saṁbhalaṇā muḥall hō*, Sayyid Muhammad Ja‘farī, *ghazal* recited at the ‘Allāmah Iqbāl Mushā’irah. I have taken slight license with the translation of the second hemistich which literally says: “But not so high that it becomes impossible to manage!”

historical Islam.⁹⁸ Instead, these received conceptual habits continue to constrain us towards such representative misrepresentations as the following pre-emptively impoverishing conclusion of Gustave von Grunebaum's which, I suspect, is still shared by many: "Islam is . . . not interested in the richest possible unfolding of man's potentialities, in that it never conceived of the forming of men as civilization's principal and most noble task."⁹⁹

Without doubt, when conceived of and identified with a regime of prescription and proscription, Islam *cannot* be interested in the richest possible unfolding of man's potentialities—in which circumstance such historical Muslims as were (and as still are) interested in such an undertaking are, to the extent of their engagement in that expansive and explorative project, not seen as acting in terms of the meaning of Islam (they are acting in other spaces and trajectories of meaning: whether secular, un-Islamic, or whatever). But this certainly was not the view of Iqbāl:

There are yet worlds un-manifest—
 For the Unseen of Existence is not empty!
 Each world awaits your expedition to it—
 Awaits the boldness of your thought and deed!
 This is the purpose of the revolutions of day and night:
 That your Self-hood may manifest itself to you!¹⁰⁰

And in many ways, Iqbāl was only re-issuing to the modernizing Muslim print-public of British colonial India the sentiment expressed by Khwājah Ghulām Farīd a generation earlier, and that, even as Iqbāl wrote, was being sung in the rural saint-shrines of the Indus valley:

⁹⁸ Certainly, we do not yet have anything for the history of societies of Muslims remotely resembling studies such as those of Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989; and Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. This is, no doubt, in considerable part because of the challenge of reading the historical sources necessary to such an undertaking—but it is also in considerable measure because of a relative failure on the part of historians and scholars of Islam to conceptualize the study of societies of Muslims in terms of the category of Self, and thus to prioritize such a study.

⁹⁹ Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, 230. A refreshingly contrary—but still regrettably exceptional—view is that of Cantwell Smith: "One's task is to apprehend the richness and variety, the dynamic and power, the depth, intricacy, beauty, and bathos of Islamic history: the range of human potentialities that were realized," Smith, "Islamic History as a Concept," 13.

¹⁰⁰ *jahān awr bhi hayñ abhī bē-namūd / kih khālī nahiñ hay žamīr-i vujūd / har ik muttažir tērī yalghār kā / tērī shōkhī-yi fikr o kirdār kā / yih hay maqṣad-i gardish-i rōzgār / kih tērī khwādi tujh pih hō ashkār*, Iqbal, "Saqinamah," in *Bāl-Jibril*, 133.

Give up imitation of ritual and custom!
Make *tahqīq* your road and uniqueness your way!¹⁰¹

And both Iqbāl and Khwājah Ghulām Farīd were only echoing the declaration of the Persian poet who was all the best-selling rage in eighteenth- to nineteenth-century North India and Central Asia (and whose *ghazals* were, according to the Tajik national poet, Ṣadr-ud-Dīn ‘Aynī, still being sung by the peasants of Central Asia in the early twentieth century), Abū-l-Ma‘ānī Mīrzā ‘Abd-ul-Qādir Bīdil of Delhi (1642–1720):

People understood something of Attributes and Names,
By way of “unity” and “multiplicity,” they understood something of
societies;
But these terms are now worn-out and spent:
It is *my meanings* that should now be understood!¹⁰²



What, then, is Islam? The immediate conceptual and analytical problem remains—as it has since the beginning of this book—the *apparently* elusive and protean quality of the phenomenon at stake. How does one pin down a phenomenon that appears so diffuse and dispersed, so complex and multi-form, so various and contradictory? At the outset of this book, and of this chapter, I quoted the statement made a thousand years ago by Ibn Sinā:

Analysis is the distinguishing of things that exist sound and true in combination—but that have become confused in the mind—in such a way that each of them is rendered separate from the others in its potential and in its definition; or in such a way that each of them comes to indicate the existence of the other, so that when one considers the state of one of them one is transported from the one to the other.

¹⁰¹ *bath ghat rīt ravash taqlidi / rah tahqīqi silk farīdi*, Khwājah Ghulām Farīd, *Divān*, 280. There is, of course, a play here on *farīdī*, “uniqueness,” which here also refers to the poet, Farīd (whose name means “Unique”): so “make Farīd-ness your way.”

¹⁰² *khalqī tawrī shifāt va asmā fahmīd / az vahdat u kasrat anjuman-hā fahmīd / ān muṣṭalahāt-i mutabazzil gasht kuhan / aknūn bāyad ma‘ānī-yi-mā fahmīd*, Abū-l-Ma‘ānī Mīrzā ‘Abd-ul-Qādir Bīdil, *Rubā’iyyat*, Kabul: Dapohini Vizārat, 1342 sh [1963], 229; cited in Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-e Hindi*,” *Annual of Urdu Studies* 19 (2004) 1–93, at 49 (compare the translation). On the historical popularity of Bīdil in Central Asia, see Erkinov, “Manuscripts of the Works by Classical Persian Authors (Hāfiẓ, Jāmī, Bīdil),” 225; and see the memoirs of Sadriddin Aynī, *The Sands of Oxus*, 176.

In putting forward a touchstone by which to assay the success of an analysis of a complex phenomenon comprised by “things that exist sound and true in combination,” Ibn Sinā speaks most suggestively to our predicament in conceptualizing Islam. I should like to follow his lead and say that when we are unable to conceptualize how the different things in combination/Islam relate to each other, we are thereby unable to conceptualize how they relate to the combination/Islam—and are thus quite unable to conceptualize Islam itself. We may, thus, gauge the validity of our conceptualization of Islam according to whether or not that conceptualization, rather than confuse the relations of those things that in social combination articulate Islam, is able instead to identify them in such a way that each indicates the other—indeed, such that our cognition of the one connects us, logically and irresistibly, to the cognition of the other. The respective things might well contradict each other, but they make each other *knowable*: the identity and meaning of the one is brought into view and recognized by the dynamic of its relationship with the identity and meaning of the other. In other words, our analysis of the contradictions of human and historical Islam will be sound if we are able to identify the things in combination in such a way that they are clearly seen to be *mutually indicated* or *mutually implicated*. A relationship of mutual implication or indication is a relationship of *meaning*: to say analytically that *x implies y* or *x indicates y* is to posit a *coherent connection* between *x* and *y* that issues from a *relational dynamic of meaning*. We must, therefore, identify the dynamic that generates these things in meaningful relation to each other. The key to conceptualizing Islam is to identify the *dynamic that renders things, despite their difference, mutually implicated in a shared process and relation of meaning*. Let us now do so.

The *islām* of an individual issues from his or her making the *shahādah* (“witnessing”), the originating declarative statement: “I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” The *shahādah* bears witness to the fact that the individual is affiliating his or her self with the historical act of God’s Revelation to His Messenger, Muhammad. The fact of God’s Revelation to Muhammad means that the historical engagement of Muslims with the Truth of the Divine necessarily constitutes/indicates a *this-worldly* engagement with *other-worldly* Truth. The historical phenomenon of Islam is the varied product of that engagement of the human with the Divine; it is the apprehension, elaboration and articulation by Muslims in their individual and collective lives of *the meaning(s) of the Truth* of the Divine Revelation: an engagement that, at its heart, is informed by the seminal question of the very constitution of the phenomenon of Revelation itself—by the question “*What is Revelation?*” The human phenomenon that is

Islam is thus the full spectrum of intellectual, material, spiritual, bodily, imaginal, psychic, social, and discursive engagements by Muslims to order and give meaning to their lives in the world through reference to and in terms of the Divine Revelation—which range of engagements are all, first and foremost, predicated upon the *various determinations* by Muslims of what Divine Revelation itself is.

I should thus like to begin to answer the question *What is Islam?* by putting forward what might, at first sight, appear to be a somewhat banal proposition: that we conceptualize Islam, in the first instance, as *hermeneutical engagement*—that is, as engagement by an actor or agent with a source or object of (potential) meaning in a way that ultimately *produces meaning for the actor* by way of the source. Conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement—rather than as any of the categories tried and tested in the discussion in Part 2—has the immediate and important analytical effect of *bringing into view and focus* the features that together are constitutive of the structure and dynamic of human and historical Islam. *Hermeneutical* draws our attention to *truth* and *meaning*, to the inter-*actions* and *processes* of *interpretation* and *understanding*, to the identity of the *sources* of meaning inter-acted with, to the *methods* employed in the *process* of *truth-knowing* and *meaning-making*.¹⁰³ *Engagement* draws our attention to the fact and role of the human actor in the process of truth- and meaning-making. To *engage* something is not merely to *involve* oneself—or, rather, one's Self—in or with that something; it is further to *attach* or *commit* one's Self to that something as being of consequence to oneself.¹⁰⁴ Hermeneutical engagement is thus to bring one's Self into the process of truth-making and meaning-making from a source—one might say that the hermeneutical actor is *l'homme engagé*; hermeneutical engagement is, in other words, to *invest* one's Self in the making of meaning (that is, in the making of consequential truth), and concomitantly to *invest or attach that truth and meaning in the making of one's Self*. It is to make one's Self *meaningful* in the terms of that hermeneutical engagement. The concept of hermeneutical engagement thus brings to the fore all of *source*, *method*, *truth*, *meaning*, *agency*, *self*, and *process*.

The obvious and necessary—indeed, crucial—question to be asked here is: what is the source-object of meaning with which the hermeneutical engage-

¹⁰³ Hermeneutics is, of course, the theory and practice of understanding and interpretation, directed ultimately at the production of truth and meaning.

¹⁰⁴ “*engage . . . I pledge, secure . . . If involve, entangle . . . Involve, commit, (oneself) in an undertaking . . . enter upon or occupy oneself in an activity from which withdrawal is difficult . . . Archit. Fasten, attach; let part of (a column) into a wall,*” *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 820.

ment that is Islam is made? It is as well to begin with identifying what the source-object of the hermeneutical engagement that is Islam is *not*: it is *not*, as is commonly and narrowly assumed, *squarely and delimitedly the text of the Qur’ān* (and the Hadith)—that is to say: it is *not* scripture alone, or scripture in and of itself. Qur’ānic hermeneutics (or Qur’ānic exegesis) is *not* quite the same thing as Islamic hermeneutics. Certainly, the human and historical phenomenon of Islam proceeds from assent to the idea of an act of disclosure or communication or revelation: the Revelation or Communication or Disclosure of Truth from the Unseen-God-beyond-this-world (Allah) to a human messenger-in-this-world called Muḥammad.¹⁰⁵ The Revelation to Muḥammad by what the Qur’ān calls “sending-down” (*tanzil*) or “intimation” (*wahy*)¹⁰⁶ from the World-of-the-Unseen (the Qur’ānic ‘ālam al-ghayb)¹⁰⁷ issues in a product in the World-of-the-Seen (the ‘ālam al-shāhādah)—which *product* is the Text of the Qur’ān.¹⁰⁸ However, *the act of Revelation to Muḥammad plus the product of text of Revelation to Muḥammad does not encompass and is not co-extensive or consubstantial with the full idea or phenomenon or reality of Revelation to Muḥammad*. Inherent in the logic of the structure of the Revelatory act (*tanzil*/sending-down; *wahy/intimation*) is a *Revelatory premise*; namely, the premise of the Universal Reality of the Unseen God whose Truth is (in some measure) knowable and becomes (in some measure) known in the Seen. *The Text of the Revelation requires as its premise an Unseen Reality or Truth that lies beyond and behind the Text of the Revelation-in-the-Seen and upon which the act, Text and truth of Revelation are contingent*. This Unseen Reality is *ontologically prior to and alethically* (that is, as regards truth) *larger than* the textual product of the Revelation: it is the source of Revelation. The act and text of the Muḥmmadan Revelation together represent a single his-

¹⁰⁵ I am using the word “revelation” here in its straightforward dictionary meaning: “1. The disclosure or communication of knowledge by a divine or supernatural agency; an instance of this; a thing disclosed or made known by divine or supernatural means. 2. A striking disclosure of something previously unknown or not realized,” *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2579.

¹⁰⁶ *Tanzil* and *wahy* are the two main concepts that the Qur’ān uses for the Revelatory act (it also uses other concepts such as *ilqā’*, or “casting,” and *inbā’*, or “informing”). On these two main concepts, see Daniel Madigan, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (editor), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006, 4:354–357.

¹⁰⁷ The Qur’ān refers more than once to “informations of the Unseen that we communicate to you [anbā’ al-ghaybi nūhī-hi ilay-kā],” Qur’ān 3:44 Āl ‘Imrān; Qur’ān 11:48 Hūd; and Qur’ān 12:108 Yūsuf.

¹⁰⁸ Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes captures the Qur’ān’s use of *ghayb* very nicely when he concludes: “The *ghayb* of the Qur’ān is sometimes the Revelation, sometimes the Unknowable, sometimes the two together [Le *ḡayb* et donc tantôt la *Révélation*, tantôt l’*Inconnaisable*, tantôt les deux ensemble,” Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, “Le sens du substantif *ḡayb* dans le Coran,” in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1957, 2:245–250, at 250.

torical instance and enactment of this larger and prior dimension of the reality of Revelation—which I will here term the *Pre-text* of Revelation.

The Pre-Text of Revelation is Pre-Text both in the sense that it is *ontologically and alethically prior to the Text* and is that upon which the Truth of the Text is contingent (as that which is *ontologically and alethically* prior to Text, Pre-Text should not be misconstrued as that which is *chronologically* prior to the Text; rather, the Pre-Text, as the world of the Unseen, is *continuously present*—or, strictly speaking, continuously absent—at all times and places as the domain of prior and higher Truth).¹⁰⁹ The Truth of the Text of the Revelation is only the Revelatory Product: as such, it is but an expression in the here-and-now of this world of the Truth of the Pre-Text of the Revelation. That the Qur’ān/Text of the Revelation is true but does not encompass all the Truth of the Unseen Pre-Text of Revelation is accepted by all Muslims. Indeed, the Qur’ān does not even claim to possess all the Truth of the Unseen made available in the Seen, saying, for example, “On Earth are signs for the sure; just as there are within your own selves: do you not see?”¹¹⁰

The historical disagreement among Muslims has been and is over the question of whether and in what degree and by what mechanism the Truth of the Pre-Text of Revelation may be accessed: is the only hermeneutical engagement that is productive of Divine Truth the hermeneutical engagement with the Text, or is the hermeneutical engagement with the Text merely a developmental preliminary to a higher hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, or is it possible to have a direct hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text without resort to the Text? To put it another way, can Truth-in-the-Pre-Text be accessed and known without the Text, or via the Text, or only in the Text? Over the course of history, Muslims have answered these questions differently: some insisting that Pre-Textual Truth can only be accessed and known in the Text, others that Pre-Textual Truth can only be accessed and known via the Text, others that Pre-Text can be known without the Text. *The human and historical phenomenon of Islam, in other words, has encompassed this full hermeneutical range.* This historical fact of Muslim engagement with the question of “What is Revelation?” in effective terms of the structural relationship of Pre-Text and Text may be illustrated by a brief schematic analysis of a

¹⁰⁹ Nor by “Pre-Text of Revelation” am I making any gesture toward the “Preserved Tablet” (*lawḥ mahfūz*) upon which the Qur’ān suggests it is (somewhere) inscribed: “It is a majestic Qur’ān on a preserved tablet [huwa Qur’ānun majīdūn fi lawḥin mahfūzin],” Qur’ān 85:22 al-Buruj.

¹¹⁰ *wa fi al-arḍi āyātun li-al-mūqinīn / wa fi anfusi-kum a fa-lā tubṣirūn*, Qur’ān 51:20 al-Dhāriyāt.

range of Muslim engagements with the Qur'ān itself, that is, of Muslim engagements with the Text of Revelation to Muḥammad.

We have seen, for example, in Chapter 1, how the project of the Islamic philosophers subjects the Qur'ān to the higher, prior and universal primacy of Reason. For the philosophers, the cosmos/God's creation is an expression and enactment of (God's) Reason: it is God's Reason that courses through the (philosophers') cosmos—one might say that, for the philosophers, Reason is the infrastructure of the cosmos—indeed, it is the fact that the cosmos is an expression of Reason that makes the Truth of the cosmos accessible and intelligible by Reason. If we re-state this in the terms I am putting forward, we can say that, for the philosophers, Reason courses through the Pre-Text that is beyond and behind the Text; indeed, Reason is, for all practical and knowable and conceivable purposes, the Pre-Text from which the Text issues and of which the Text is a rationally and semantically inferior instantiation—that is, an inferior instantiation in terms of Reason and its meanings. Thus, for the philosophers, the meaning of the Text is entirely contingent on the larger and prior meaning of the Pre-Text—which is, and is knowable by, Reason. Reason, in other words, is Revelation.¹¹¹ The hermcneutical engagement of the philosophers is thus, in the first instance, *not* an engagement with the Text of Revelation (the Qur'ān), but rather with the Pre-Text of Revelation—which is why it is an engagement with Reason. This is nicely expressed by the twelfth-century author, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Umar al-Balkhi (d. 1164), in presenting a debate between a proponent of the epistemology of knowledge by pure reason [*'aql*] and a proponent of the epistemology of knowledge by received transmission and authoritative consensual validation of scripture and its interpretation [*naql*] in which the proponent of *'aql*/reason argues that “knowledge and learning and understanding of Pure Essence [*'ilm va ma'rifat va daryāft-i zāt-i muqaddas*]” is possible only by means of “the Organizing Intellect [*'aql-i mudabbir*] by the execution [*tadbīr*] of which the constellations are raised up

¹¹¹ In a suggestive essay that “seeks to recover a concept of revelation *and* a concept of reason that, without ever coinciding, can at least enter into a living dialectic and together engender something like an understanding of faith,” Paul Ricoeur proceeds from the premise that “Revelation is the speech of another behind the speech of the prophet” and goes on to argue for “another dimension of revelation,” namely “revelation as wisdom”: “The notion of revelation differs from one mode of discourse to another, especially when we pass from prophecy to wisdom. The prophet claims divine inspiration as guaranteeing what he says. The sage . . . does not declare that his speech is the speech of another. But he does know that wisdom precedes him . . . Intimacy with Wisdom is not to be distinguished from Intimacy with God. By this detour wisdom rejoins prophecy. The objectivity of wisdom signifies the same thing as does the subjectivity of prophetic inspiration.” See Paul Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977) 1–35, at 1, 4 and 13.

and the earth set in place”¹¹² and which is “the gauge of truth, the scale of justice, and the astrolabe of certainty and knowledge [*mi'yār-i ṣidq va mīzān-i 'adl va ustūrlāb-i yaqīn va ma'rifat*].”¹¹³

As Fazlur Rahman notes, “the parallel (or even the identity) between the revelation of the Qur’ān and the revelation of the universe has been pointed out by several medieval Muslim authors who have noted the numerous passages in which the revelation of the Qur’ān and the creation of nature are coupled.”¹¹⁴ The cosmos or God’s Rational Creation, in its limitless multiplicity and multi-dimensionality of phenomenal forms is, thus, the prolific execution or emplotment of the Truth/Reason of the Pre-Text of Revelation.¹¹⁵ The fact that the cosmos is the expression of the Truth/Reason of the Pre-Text of Revelation means that the Truth of the Pre-Text is accessible in and via the cosmos by Reason; however, the multiplicity and multi-dimensionality of the cosmos renders this a difficult task. The Text is the more limited expression of Truth/Reason of Revelation in the more limited form of *discourse*; the limited form of the Text makes its Truth easier to access, but also means that it is able to register and contain less of the Truth of Pre-Text, both as regards quantity and quality of Truth. The philosophers are educated and trained and disciplined in the instruments of the Truth of the Pre-Text—that is, the instruments of Reason (the Queen among which is the logical syllogism)—the exercise of which instruments is the *method* by which philosophers access Real-Truth: Reason *über Alles* (but not Reason *über Allah*) is the philosopher’s

¹¹² The allusion is to Qur’ānic verses such as “Do they not look to the camels, how they are created / And at the sky, how it is raised up / and at the mountains, how they are fixed firm / and to the earth, how it is spread out? [a-fa-lā yanżurūna ilā al-ibili kayfa khuligat / wa ilā al-samā'i kayfa rufi'at / wa ilā al-jibāli kayfa nuṣibat / wa ilā al-ardī kayfa sutiḥat],” Qur’ān 88:17–19 al-Ghāshiyah.

¹¹³ Naṣr-Allāh Pūrjavādī, *Zabān-i ḥāl dar 'irfān va adabiyāt-i pārsī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Hirmiz, 1385 sh [2006], 635. Attention is drawn to this work by Sonja Brentjes, “The Interplay of Science, Art and Literature in Islamic Societies before 1700,” in Amiya Dev (editor), *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization. Volume XV, Part 3. Science, Literature and Aesthetics*, New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2009, 454–484, at 476.

¹¹⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān*, Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980, 71.

¹¹⁵ In his classic study of *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, Arthur J. Arberry cites pre-World War II Christian theologians’ “growing tendency to substitute for the old distinction of natural and revealed knowledge the new distinction between a general and special revelation,” adding “this idea . . . appears to be little more than a reformulation of a principle implicitly accepted for many centuries. So far as Islam is concerned, the general and special revelation is fully justified by reference to the Koran. *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork* is an ever-repeated theme The reiterated and unambiguous teaching of the Koran on the two orders of revelation—God’s power as seen in His creation, and God’s will as disclosed to His Messengers—opened the way to a rational discussion of religious truths long before the rise of theological controversy,” Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, 12, 14.

epistemology. Through Reason, the philosophers produce Real-Truth directly from the Pre-Text rather than from the Text (the Qur'ān), the mediation of which latter is not necessary (or even necessarily useful) for them to access and know the Divine Truth (although it is necessary for the great mass of non-philosophers inexpert in Reason). Built-in to this cosmological structure of Revelation wherein the Text is an inferior expression of the Pre-Text/Reason is the fact that the Truths of the Pre-Text are in one sense or measure or value the *same* as the Truth of the Text of Revelation, but they are in another sense or measure or value *different*—one might say that the Truth of the Pre-Text and the Truth of the Text are different *isotopes* of the same Truth.¹¹⁶ Therefore—and this is crucial—though the truth-statements of Pre-Text and Text may differ in their form to the point of apparent contradiction, *there is no essential difference and no semantic disconnect* between the truths of Pre-Text and Text: rather, they are connected in a hierarchical communicative continuum of (God's) Reason; they are both part-and-parcel of the logic and structure and reality of the meaning(s) of Revelation. Thus, they are all part-and-parcel of Islam—they are all Islamic.

Similarly, we have seen in Chapter 1 that *the Sufi project is also ultimately concerned with accessing the Truth of the Pre-Text of Revelation which lies beyond and behind the Truth of the Text*. But, unlike the philosophers, for whom the business of the Pre-Text, and thus the means of knowing the Truth of the Pre-Text, is Reason, for the Sufis it is Existence. For the Sufis, it is Divine Existence that courses through the cosmos: the fact that the cosmos is the expression of the Truth/Divine Existence of the Pre-Text of Revelation means that the Truth of the Pre-Text is accessible in and *via* the cosmos by *existential* knowing of the cosmos, which is the process of experiential annexation by the individual of his/her limited material existence into the limitless Universal Divine Existence (the Pre-Text). This is a holistic experience, encompassing body, mind and spirit; and, thus, requiring training and disciplining of body, mind and spirit through physical privation, intellectual conceptualization, and meditative contemplation, in order to equip the Sufi to exist in the world in a way as to bring him/her into experiential recognition of and configuration with the Unseen Truth of the cosmos—in a way that will eventually experientially transport him or her from the vistas of the Seen to the vision of the Unseen/Pre-Text/Divine Existence. When done properly, Existence is Revelation. The definitive form of knowing for the Sufi is precisely *kashf* or

¹¹⁶ “*isotope . . . Each of two or more varieties of a particular chemical element which have different numbers of neutrons in the nucleus, and therefore different relative atomic masses and different nuclear (but the same chemical) properties,*” *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1427.

revelation—the direct personal, experiential, existential apprehension by the individual Sufi of Real-Truth/Meaning from/in the Unseen.¹¹⁷ While the ultimate experience of knowing is personal and subjective, the means by which the individual develops his/her capacity to know are socially-instructed and objective. Hence, Sufism is not a freelance, anything-goes sort of mysticism: it is personal experience made possible and meaningful by immersion in the collective experience of the community of Sufis. The means and medium for the Sufi's transportation to, experience of, and revelation from the Unseen/Pre-Text is the socially-trained and individually-talented Imagination—which is precisely the instrument for the visionary experience of the Real-Truth of that which is beyond the material and Textual grasp.¹¹⁸ For Sufis, the Messenger or Prophet is, above all, a *Sufi* who accesses directly by his Visionary Imagination the Real-Truth of the Pre-Text. He is also someone who, like Sufis, seeks to instruct lesser persons in the Real-Truth of the Pre-Text in the degrees to which those lesser persons are able to access truth. The Prophet or Messenger communicates that infinite Real-Truth of the Pre-Text in the finite medium of the Text of Revelation, which is a representation of Real-Truth that is constrained by the very fact of its confinement in the limited possibilities of human language. Thus, we find that Sufi exegesis of the Qur'ān conceives of the language of the Text of the Qur'ān as *ishārāt*—literally, “pointers” or “indications” or “allusions” to the higher Unseen Truth of the Pre-Text (whereas the level of meaning attained by non-Sufi exegesis of the Qur'ān is called by Sufis *'ibārāt* or “expressions,” that is to say “expressions of the Text”).¹¹⁹ The hermeneutical engagement of Sufism with the Text of Reveala-

¹¹⁷ *Kashf* literally means “to remove the covering from something,” and is thus often translated as “to unveil”; to unveil is precisely to *reveal*: “*Kaṣf o Ṣohud* (‘unveiling and witnessing’), terms commonly used by Muslim mystics to describe the acquisition of esoteric knowledge and the constant first-hand encountering of the divine presence,” Cyrus Ali Zargar, “*Kaṣf o Ṣohud*,” in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982–, 15:668–673, at 668.

¹¹⁸ On this, see Fazlur Rahman, “Dream, Imagination and ‘Ālam al-mithāl,” in G. E. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois (editors), *The Dream and Human Societies*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, 409–419.

¹¹⁹ It will do no harm, here, to re-iterate the preamble to the Qur'ān commentary of Rūzbihān Baqī, cited in Chapter 1: “God gave the exterior reins of the Qur'ān into the hands of the people of the Exeriority from among the scholars and philosophers, so that they legislate in its (exterior) rulings and limitations and forms and laws. And He made the Unseen of the Secrets of His Discourse and the concealed subtleties of His Signs for His elect few, and made Himself manifest from His words to their hearts, spirits, intellects and secretmost-selves, by means of revelation, direct vision and clarification, and He taught them the sciences of His Real-Truths, and the rarenesses of His subtleties, and He purified the rungs of their intellects by revelations of the lights of His Beauty, and sanctified their faculties of comprehension for the brilliance of his Majesty,

tion thus serves as a sort of *rite de passage* in which the epistemological goal is to *traverse* the Truth of the Text, the *shari'ah*, so as to attain personal revelatory engagement with the Real-Truth of the Pre-Text, the *haqīqah*.¹²⁰ The Sufi path is a hierarchy of Knowing whose successive rungs are the higher and higher experience-stations (*maqāmāt*) in the journey towards the Real-Truth of the Pre-Text which the elect few come to know by an intensely personal experience in and of the Self (while most others either will attain to one of many intermediary stages between Text and Pre-Text, or simply remain with the Text). As the Sufi, Rūzbihān Bāqlī, said in his autobiography about his own attainment of the Truth of the Unseen:

The Truth appeared to me . . . having likened Himself, the Exalted One, to a beautiful form with which He awakened the affection of His lovers . . . He gladdened my heart by His appearance in an aspect so congenial to the secret of my love.¹²¹

. . . I merged with pure love and affection. Suddenly, the essence-spring of beginningless existence was revealed to me . . . The treasures and signs of the Unseen (*ghayb*) were, upon the threshold of Unsee-ing (*ghaybat*), laid open to my secret.¹²²

As evident from Ruzbihān's representative testimony, Sufi experiential knowledge of Truth is profoundly *personal* and *internal* and is experienced by

and He made these the repositories for the trusts of the concealed signs of His discourse and for the complex secrets which He has reposed in his Book, and for the subtle allusions in the ambiguities and difficulties of the Verses. And He Himself taught them the meanings of that which He hid in the Qur'ān so that they come to know by His making it known to them. And He lined their eyes with the light of closeness to Him and attainment to Him, and made them privy to the unseens of the virgin-brides of ruling and of knowledges and revelations, and of the meanings of the understanding of the understanding, and of the secret of the secret, the Exteriority of which in the Qur'ān is ruling, but within the Interiority of which is allusion and revelation which God-the-Truth set aside for the pure-for-Him and for His greatest friends, and for his far-come lovers from among the truth-full and those-drawn-near."

¹²⁰ See the quotation from the *Masnāvī* of Rūmī in Chapter 1.

¹²¹ *wa zahara l-i al-haqq . . . qad maththala nafsa-hu ta'älā bi-ṣūrah ḥasanah min ḥaythu ta'ṭṭufi-hi 'alā 'ishiqi-hi . . . wa ṫayyaba qalb-i bi-zuhūri-hi bi-wasf yalīq sīr 'ishq-i*, Abū Muḥammad Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Baqlī, *Kitāb kashf al-asrār* (edited by Firoozeh Papan-Matin in collaboration with Michael Fishbein), in Firoozeh Papan-Matin, *The Unveiling of Secrets*, Kashf al-Asrār, *The Visionary Biography of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006, 42 (compare the translation of Carl W. Ernst: Ruzbihān Baqli, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master* [translated by Carl W. Ernst], Chapel Hill: Parvardigar Press, 1997, 55).

¹²² *dar 'ishq va muḥabbat-i śirf uftādam nāgāh 'ayn-i qidam bar man kashf shud . . . kunūz va rumūz-i ghayb az 'atabah-i ghaybat bar sīr-am munfatih shud* (compare the translation of Papan-Matin, *The Unveiling of Secrets*, 22).

the subjective Self within and of itself as the ultimate locus of the Sufi hermeneutical engagement with the Truth of the Unseen Pre-Text.

It is the very structural logic of the claim of the discourse and practice of Sufism to the Truth of the Pre-Text (along with its prolific social appeal at all levels of society) that gives rise to the historically recurrent social tension between the discourse and practice of Sufism and the discourse and practice of Islamic law. In distinction from the philosophers and the Sufis, *the hermeneutical engagement of the discursive project of Islamic fiqh-law is almost entirely a hermeneutical engagement with the Text*.¹²³ This is not to say that the discourse of *fiqh*-law does not accept the structural fact of the Revelatory Premise of the Pre-Text: it does so fully. As Ebrahim Moosa has pointed out:

There is a cosmology underlying Muslim juristic theology or legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). This cosmological narrative enables us to bridge the discursive divide between the empirical and transcendental realms . . . law is related to both cosmogonic and cosmological myths. Part of Islamic law is related to a myth before the creation of the world . . . there is hardly a chance of ignoring the dualism of the empirical and the transcendental in Muslim legal cosmology. For the classical and medieval jurists, the term *hukm* was the locus for an amalgam of the eternal and temporal dimensions.¹²⁴

However, the discourse of Islamic law holds, either that truth cannot be accessed directly from the Pre-Text (other than by Prophets in the form of the Text of Divine Revelation, culminating in that Text Revealed to Muhammad), or that such truth as can be accessed directly from the Pre-Text has no probative, public and socially-actionable value—that is, no value and meaning beyond the entirely personal, subjective, and private. When the practitioners of Islamic legal methodology do seek to go beyond or behind the Text to identify underlying principles (*uṣūl*, singular *asl*) or values (*aḥkām*, singular *hukm*) or *rationes legis* (*‘ilal*, singular *‘illah*), they do so *via* the statements of the Text, *via* legal methodology which is, in the first instance, a methodology of the Text, and seek to justify such Pre-Textual values as are identified by these methods as being self-evidently tied to and expressed in the Text—that is, to identify Pre-Text as Text. The project of Islamic law thus proceeds, to the fullest extent possible, on the assumption of the necessary instructive sufficiency

¹²³ The tendency to identify Islamic hermeneutics with Islamic *legal* hermeneutics has been addressed in our treatment of David R. Vishanoff and of Armando Salvatore, in Chapter 2.

¹²⁴ Ebrahim Moosa, “Allegory of the Rule (*Hukm*): Law as Simulacrum in Islam?” *History of Religions* 38 (1998) 1–24, at 2, 7, and 16.

for human beings of communication from the Pre-Text to Messengers in/as Text—and, as such, does not, in the first instance, seek to engage directly with the Truth of the Pre-Text. Rather, the project of Islamic law seeks and deals in, to the greatest extent possible, only such truths from the Unseen Source/Pre-Text as the Pre-Text has seen fit more-or-less expressly to state in the Text and to make transparent and plainly available for general practical application in the Seen. The fact that legal scholars, unlike philosophers, do not seek to engage directly with the Truth of the Pre-Text means that, while legal scholars make abundant use of reason in the process of identifying Islamic law, they do so with presumptions that constrain their use of reason in terms of its relation to Text.¹²⁵ Thus, while both the lawyers and the philosophers use reason in the same way as a *technology*, the lawyers and the philosophers do not conceive of reason the same way as a *science*. Thus, it would be misleading for us to say, “The lawyers reason like the philosophers do.” Rather, the fact is that, ultimately, “The lawyers reason *unlike* the philosophers do”—we can call the one, Pre-Textual-Reason, and the other, Textual-reason—because the lawyers conceive of reason unlike the philosophers do: the rational business of philosophy is the business of the Pre-Text, whereas the rational business of Islamic law is the business of the Text.

Kalām-theology, on the other hand, is caught somewhere in the middle: its practitioners seek truth about the Pre-Text (i.e. about God and the Unseen), but by and large confine that (rational)¹²⁶ search to hermeneutical engagement with the Text. It is this task of seeking the Pre-Text in the Text that gives rise to what is probably the historically definitive hermeneutical predicament of *kalām*-theology: namely, when and how to read the theological statements of the Text of the Qur’ān *literally*—that is, in a manner that conforms to and is limited by the evident surface of the language of the Text; and when and how to read the theological statements of the Text of the Qur’ān *metaphorically*—

¹²⁵ Although, as we shall see in our discussion of *maṣlaḥah* or public welfare in Chapter 6, as a practical matter some lawyers do make implicit concessions to Pre-Text when engagement with the Text alone does not do the job.

¹²⁶ Lenn Goodman has drawn attention to the differentiated notions of what constitutes reason: “For each of these disciplines affirms its own distinctive notion of reason and the reasonable. Reason in Islamic law, as in law everywhere, will mean analogy with precedent. In *kalām* it will mean dialectical, hypothetical inference, anchored in some seeming common ground. In *falsafa* reason will mean something more: rational intuition and its discursive exhibition in syllogistic argument. But in *adab* reason will mean sound judgment, deference to experience, that is, to the history, learning, and wisdom of the nations, which Islamic civilization has inherited from its predecessors and made over in new form. And in Sufism, reason itself will be sublimated into a pietist sensibility that trumps the work of philosophy in framing the parameters of a culture,” Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 87. I disagree with some of Goodman’s characterizations, but endorse his basic point.

that is, in a manner that refigures the literal language of the Text to a meaning beyond and behind the evident surface. This dilemma is exemplified in the definitive stance of post-formative theology on the question of the anthropomorphic Attributes of God mentioned in the Qur'ān: such as that God sees, or has a face, or a hand, or that He is settled upon a throne, or even just that He discourses in a language spoken by a particular group of humans—and the refractory problem of how to reconcile these statements with God's doubly exclusionary self-statement of His Uniqueness: "There is nothing like His likeness."¹²⁷ The discourse of post-formative *kalām*-theology accepts that these statements of the Text about the Unseen God—and, for that matter, the statements of Text about the Text itself—are limited expressions of the truth of the Pre-Text, but by-and-large insists also that we cannot know anything further about the Pre-Text of the Revelation *beyond or behind* that which has been put or translated from the Pre-Text into the words of the Text of the Revelation. This is the famous *kalām* principle of accepting Textual statements about the Pre-Text *bi-lā-kayf*—“without (asking) how”¹²⁸—which, in the terms I am putting forward, means *without asking the Pre-Text*.¹²⁹

The crucial fact for us here is that the Revelation to Muḥammad has, as a human and historical fact, been conceived of and engaged with by Muslims, not merely as Revelatory Product (the Text) but also as Revelatory Premise (the Pre-Text); that is, not merely as the *event* of Text as Revelation-in-the-world to Muḥammad, but *also* as the *phenomenon* of Revelation-in-the-cosmos that lies behind and beyond the Revelatory event to Muḥammad—a *phenomenon that renders the whole cosmos (including the world beyond the Text) a source for Revealed Truth*. As such, human and historical Islam is nothing other

¹²⁷ *laysa ka-mithli-hi shay'*; Qur'ān 42:11 al-Shūra.

¹²⁸ See Binyamin Abrahamov, “The *bi-lā kayfa* Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology,” *Arabica* 42 (1995) 365–379.

¹²⁹ Paul Ricoeur has proposed that “what is finally understood in a text is . . . the sort of world intended beyond the text as its reference . . . the issue of the text is the world the text unfolds before itself;” Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” 23. If we adopt and slightly adapt from discourse theory the concept of “entextualization”—that is, to turn something into a text—we can say that since one group of Muslims conceives of the Truth of Revelation as accessible only in the Text, and another group of Muslims conceives of the the Truth of Revelation as accessible also in Pre-Text, each of these two stances *entextualizes* the Text differently. In other words, each of philosophy, Sufism, law, *etcetera*, precisely because of their respective attitudes to Pre-Text, *entextualizes* the Qur'ān differently—that is, turns it into a text that is crucially different to the text of the other group—and thus unfolds a different world before and beyond the text. As Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban observe, “the context of entextualization affects one’s orientation to the source discourse and also the shape of the text produced.” Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, “The Natural History of Discourse,” in Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (editors), *Natural Histories of Discourse*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 1–17, 4.

than the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation in all its dimensions and loci—that is, the hermeneutical engagement with the Revelatory Phenomenon comprising both Revelatory Premise and Revelatory Product—which is to say (at this stage in the development of our thesis), hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Text and Pre-Text. This hermeneutical engagement takes place by a wide spectrum of means and produces a wide spectrum of meanings. Islam is the full array of these means and the full field of these meanings: it is *means and meanings*.



However, there is a further dimension to hermeneutical engagement with Revelation. Hermeneutical engagements, do not, of course, take place in a vacuum: rather, any hermeneutical engagement with Revelation is an act that is carried out in a historical context. And, of course, any given historical context for hermeneutical engagement contains elements that have been produced by the array of hermeneutical engagements that have preceded it. In Muslim communities of long historical standing, the context in which hermeneutical engagement takes place will have been very considerably produced and informed by previous hermeneutical engagements with Revelation. In other words, these hermeneutical engagements are taking place in a context whose components have largely already acquired meaning in terms of Islam—these are contexts which are already highly populated by the *Islamic*. In historical situations where Islam enters into and develops in human communities that have not previously been exposed to it (whether this is a circumstance of seventh-century conquest, or twentieth-century immigration), the context for hermeneutical engagement will contain a larger number of elements that are extraneous to and have *not* been produced by earlier hermeneutical engagement—in these situations, there are a larger number of elements that have not already acquired meaning in terms of Islam.

I should thus like to make the distinction between *context* and what I should like to call the Con-Text of Revelation. *Con-Text of Revelation* is the body of meaning that is the product and outcome of previous hermeneutical engagement with Revelation. *Con-Text is, in other words, that whole field or complex or vocabulary of meanings of Revelation that have been produced in the course of the human and historical hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, and which are thus already present as Islam.*

As meaning produced by prior hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, Con-Text necessarily includes the full encyclopaedia of epistemologies, interpretations, identities, persons and places, structures of authority, textualities

and intertexualities, motifs, symbols, values, meaningful questions and meaningful answers, agreements and disagreements, emotions and affinities and affects, aesthetics, modes of saying, doing and being, and other truth-claims and components of existential exploration and meaning-making in terms of Islam that Muslims *acting as Muslims* have produced, and to which Muslims *acting as Muslims* have attached themselves during the process of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation. Con-Text, of course, does not only take the form of textual discourse, but includes the various individual and collective practices (both experiential and ritual) that constitute action made meaningful to the actor in terms of Islam: prayer, fasting, visitation of saint-tombs, *dhikr* and *samā'*, meditative seclusion (*i'tikāf*), alms-giving, celebration of Feast days and saint days, pilgrimage to Mecca (or other sacred cities), marriage ceremonies, circumcision, head-shaving ('*aqīqah*), completion of a child's first recitation of the Qur'an, funeral rites, animal slaughter, sartoriality, gestures of comportment such as modes of greeting, acts of hospitality, demonstrations of trust and solidarity, modes of domesticity and publicity, *etcetera*. It obviously includes the discourse of every *Muslim actor* and *meaning-maker* cited so far in this book: the discourses of Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī, Hāfiẓ, Rūmī, Jāmī, Ghālib, Amīr Khusraw and Nīzām-ud-Dīn, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, Sādiqī Bēg Afshār, Kātib Çelebī, al-Bukhārī, al-Nawawī, al-Dhahabī, Ibn al-Jawzi, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Sayyid Abū-l-'Alā Mawdūdī, et alia, *in all their variety and contradiction*. One might say that Con-Text constitutes the human and historical bag-and-baggage of Revelation—the human and historical bag-and-baggage of Islam.

Con-Text is thus the entire accumulated *lexicon of means and meanings of Islam* that has been historically generated and recorded up to any given moment: it is the full *historical vocabulary of Islam* at any given moment. When a Muslim seeks to make meaning in *terms of Islam*, he necessarily does so in engagement with and by use of the existing *terms of engagement*—that is, in engagement with and by use of the existing *vocabulary of Islam*. The vocabulary of Islam registers, denotes and makes available the meanings of previous hermeneutical engagement; the meanings of previous hermeneutical engagements are, in other words, discernibly embedded in the semantic units of this existing vocabulary of forms. Thus, in a given time or place, for the meaning of an act or utterance to be *recognizable in terms of Islam* it must be expressed in the vocabulary of Con-Text. Con-Text supplies the *architectonics of meaning* or *the terms of Islam*, which, when beheld by the one observing or engaging with it, calls forth the *recognition*, and hence the *appellation: Islam(ic)*.

It might be useful to think of Con-Text in terms of a *built environment of meaning*—built, that is, out of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation—

which Muslims inhabit; an environment in which, as Henri Lefebvre said about the Renaissance town, “each building, each addition . . . each innovation modified the whole, and each ‘object’—as though it had hitherto been somewhat external—came to affect the entire fabric.”¹³⁰ Con-Text is the centuries-old city of Islam, a great and sprawling city consisting of various edifices erected for the various purposes of living by Muslims of bygone and present times, made in different forms and out of different materials, in various states of preservation, renovation and disrepair, of wide-ranging functions with different degrees of use and dis-use, with quarters and neighbourhoods inhabited by diverse peoples doing different things—all of which are nonetheless *component elements in a part of what is ultimately, for all its citizens, the same shared environment and ecosystem of living and identification.* The *citizen* is the one who lives in a city with which he *identifies* and *affiliates* himself—even if the specific constitution of his particular identification with the city may differ from that of another fellow-citizen, and even as what he thinks is good or bad about the city (what he thinks should be knocked down or restored, what should serve as a model for further construction, and what he thinks should be abandoned) might differ from that of a fellow-citizen. As the citizen moves about the city, its diverse component elements invoke and provoke in him different responses of orientation, narration and attachment; yet, he *recognizes* these edifices—even the ones he does not like—as edifices of *this city*. And even if some edifices are at some point destroyed, they remain in the memory (until such time as they are forgotten) as edifices of *this city*, as a part and parcel of its history and of the meanings that its name evokes.

It is important to be cognizant of the fact that, as the product of prior hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, *Con-Text is, ultimately, genealogically traceable and semantically attributable to Text and/or Pre-Text* whence Con-Text has been elaborated. However, it is equally important to be aware of the concomitant fact that, in any given instance or locus of hermeneutical engagement, *Text and Pre-Text are part of Con-Text* since it is only in the *received* terms and vocabulary of Con-Text that the *meanings* of Text and Pre-Text *reach* and are operational in a given Muslim or society of Muslims. It is on account of this *accompanying or comprising* quality that I am calling it *Con-Text*. As a practical matter, *Text and Pre-Text are simply not available for hermeneutical engagement without Con-Text*: Text and Pre-Text are semanti-

¹³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 272. I first put forward something resembling an idea of Con-Text as “architectures of meaning” in a lecture at the University of California at Santa Barbara in 2001 entitled “‘Ajā‘ib al-Hind, Armaghān-i Ḥijāz: Rethinking Islam Across South Asia and the Middle East.” I am grateful to the audience for their engagement with the idea that day—which led me to think about it further down the years.

cally embedded in Con-Text; Con-Text constantly informs (in-forms) Text and Pre-Text. Quite simply, *a Muslim lives in Con-Text*: s/he lives in the complex of meanings that is the elaborated product of previous hermeneutical engagement with Revelation.

Thus, in any context, *the hermeneutical act necessarily takes place in terms of Con-Text: to undertake a hermeneutical engagement with Revelation is necessarily to engage with Con-Text*. As the pre-existing meaning of Revelation with which, within which, by which and from which Muslims necessarily engage to make any further meaning, *Con-Text is itself a source of Revelation* along with Pre-Text and Text: it is the *Con-Text of Revelation*. Con-Text, Text, and Pre-Text are inseparably enmeshed together to form the Revelatory matrix of Islam: they are the Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation.¹³¹

Perhaps, my concept of Con-Text may usefully be fleshed out by way of Yuri Lotman's concept of the "semiotic space" or "semiosphere" of a particular shared language; in the present case, the language of Islam:

A schema consisting of addresser, addressee and the channel linking them together is not yet a working system. For it to work it has to be "immersed" in semiotic space. All participants in the communicative act must have some experience of communication, be familiar with semiosis. So, paradoxically, semiotic experience precedes the semiotic act. By analogy with the biosphere (Vernadsky's concept) we could talk of a semiosphere, which we shall define as the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages . . . The unit of semiosis, the smallest functioning mechanism, is not the separate language but the whole semiotic space of the language in question. This is the space we term the semiosphere. The semiosphere is the result and condition for the development of culture; we justify our term by analogy with the biosphere, as Vernadsky defined it, namely the totality and the organic whole of living matter and also the condition for the continuation of

¹³¹ A reader might here think that what I mean by Con-Text corresponds to the idea of "tradition," whether in the famous sense put forward by Hans-Georg Gadamer ("The hermeneutical experience is concerned with what has been transmitted in tradition . . . but tradition is not simply a process that we learn to know and be in command of through experience; it is a language . . . tradition is a genuine partner in communication, with which we have fellowship as does the 'I' with a 'Thou,'" Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, 321 [first published in German as *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960]), or as in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's "cumulative tradition" treated above in Chapter 4. The concept of "tradition" does not, however, express the fundamental thrust and pivot of the concept of Con-Text—which is that *Con-Text is part-and-parcel of the Revelatory matrix of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text*.

life . . . the semiosphere is marked by its heterogeneity . . . imagine a museum hall where exhibits from different periods are on display, along with inscriptions in known and unknown languages, and instructions for decoding them; besides there are the explanations composed by the museum staff, plans for tours and rules for the behaviour of the visitors. Imagine also in this hall tour-leaders and the visitors and imagine all this as a single mechanism (which *in a certain sense* it is). This is an image of the semiosphere. Then we have to remember that all elements of the semiosphere are in dynamic, not static, correlations whose terms are constantly changing.¹³²

Con-Text, then, is the heterogeneous totality of the historical product of previous hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation: it is the entire *storehouse of means and meanings of Islam* that are under ongoing production, that are in dynamic co-relation with each other, and that are, as Lotman says, at once, “the whole semiotic space of the language in question” and “the smallest functioning mechanism . . . for communication,” experience of which “single mechanism . . . precedes the semiotic act”—the act of meaning-making. Each hermeneutical engagement, by entering into and taking its place in the Con-Text as an action and *artifact of meaning* becomes itself a part of the semiosphere in which subsequent hermeneutical engagement takes place. Inasmuch as meaning from Revelation may be made by hermeneutical engagement with *any artifact of meaning* that is preserved in the semiosphere of the Con-Text of Revelation, each artifact or vocabulary unit of Con-Text is itself a potential *point of hermeneutical entry* and a potential *point of hermeneutical departure* for engagement with Revelation. Further, an artifact of meaning in the semiosphere/Con-Text might inform the hermeneutical engagement of a given actor without the actor even being aware of it, but simply by virtue of that hermeneutical engagement necessarily taking place in the semiosphere/Con-Text/language in which the semantic artifact and the actor are both embedded and within which the hermeneutical actor necessarily moves and is engaged.

Thinking in terms of the concept of Con-Text of Revelation as the “semiotic space” or “semiosphere” of the language of Islam induces us, in turn to pay especial heed in our conceptualization of Islam to the element of *language*. In thinking about the language of Islam, we need, in the first instance, to be cognizant of the *vocabulary of Islam*; that is, the particular words, objects, im-

¹³² Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 123–127.

ages, symbols, actions and representations—whether syllogism, *samā‘*, wine-cup, *jihād*, or *Majnūn*—in which meaning is reposited and embedded. When people employ these words, objects, images, symbols, actions and representations from Con-Text they are using the units of meaning-making, or the vocabulary, of a particular language—effectively, they are *speaking Islam/ic*. And in the second and further instance, we need to think seriously about and pay attention not merely to the vocabulary that people employ, but to how they *use* those words and actions as *language*—most significantly, how they use language in those registers of speech and action that are regarded in society as most productive of *meaning*. This is something to which I will come later in the present chapter.

But first (and this is important): the fact of the matter is that it is highly unlikely that the *totality* of the means and meanings of Con-Text will be present in any given time or place—that is, it is unlikely that the totality of Con-Text will be present in any given locale or context. Not all elements of Con-Text make their way (equally) to or live on (equally) in all times and places. Con-Text—the totality of meanings produced by hermeneutical engagement—is, as a historical and social matter, *differentiatedly* present in different *contexts*. Thus, having made the distinction between context and Con-Text, we must now go on to make the further distinction between Con-Text *in toto*, on the one hand, and such Con-Text as is actively present in any given context—what we might call Con-Text-in-context or Con-Text *in loco*, on the other hand.

For example, the ideas of Ibn Sīnā are an important element of Con-Text *in toto*. But in a historical society of Muslims where the ideas of Ibn Sīnā are not read, studied and circulated as a part of meaning-making (such as in most contemporary modern societies of Muslims), in that context, these ideas are not a part of Con-Text *in loco*. However, in a historical society of Muslims where the ideas of Ibn Sīnā are read, studied and circulated as a part of meaning-making—such as in the historical societies of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex where the writings of Ibn Sīnā constituted a foundational element of the educational canon, with the result that his ideas were a deeply-embedded part of the received and rehearsed vocabulary of concepts and values—they are here present as Con-text *in loco*. Now, the point here is that where the ideas of Ibn Sīnā are present as Con-Text *in loco*/Con-Text-in-context, these will inevitably be present, attendant and participant in the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation—that is, in determining *What is Islam?* in that context.

Similarly, in a historical society of Muslims where the motif of *Majnūn* as configuration of the ethos of the *madhhab-i ‘ishq* constitutes a pivotal ele-

ment of the literary canon—that is, where Majnūn and the *madhab-i ‘ishq* is a deeply-embedded part of the received and rehearsed vocabulary of concepts and values; i.e. of the Con-Text *in loco*—Majnūn and the *madhab-i ‘ishq* will inevitably be present, attendant and participant (if not dominant) in the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation—that is, in the constitution of *What is Islam?*—in that context. Similarly, in historical societies of Muslims where it is the modes of thought, values and sources of juridical discourse that are dominant in the received and rehearsed canon—such as, in one form or another, they largely are in modern societies of Muslims—it is these elements of Con-Text *in loco* that will inevitably be present, attendant, participant and dominant in the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation—that is, in answering the question *What is Islam?*—in that context. Nonetheless, to the extent that the universal lexicon of Con-Text *in toto* remains in circulation and is available for consultation and exploration, all of its elements—as pre-existing answers to the question *What is Islam?* are *potentially* available at any given moment to be taken on as Con-Text *in loco*, and are thus potentially available for mobilization and utilization in any given hermeneutical engagement. And, by the same token, when we ask the question *What is Islam?*—meaning, what is Islam *in toto*?—our answer must include the entirety of Con-Text.¹³³

As Con-Text, Islam always *precedes* the Muslim. Thus, while I have emphasized the dynamic by which Muslims make Islam as Islam makes Muslims, the fact that all meaning-making by Muslims necessarily proceeds, in the first instance, from the field of meaning that is Con-Text means that Islam always precedes the Muslim, even when that Muslim then goes on to make something new in terms of Islam. It is for this reason that the question “What is Islam?” must be answered before we can answer the question “What is a Muslim”: we must begin with Islam because it is with Islam that a *Muslim begins*, even though the Islam whence the Muslim begins may be different to the Islam where he or she ends up (and to the Islam whence another Muslim begins and where he or she ends up). Thus, while it is correct to say as people do that there is no Islam without Muslims, it is equally important to bear in mind that there are no Muslims without Islam.

¹³³ In conceptualizing Islam, it is thus inadequate to say *simpliciter* that “Muslims may be united in the primacy they accord to particular sources of religious authority, but engage with, interpret and apply those sources differently in different contexts”. Simply, “context” is not the same as Con-Text, which is at once both “source” and “context.” See Zulfikar Hirji, “Debating Islam from Within: Muslim Constructions of the Internal Order,” in Zulfikar Hirji (editor), *Diversity and Pluralism in Islam: Historical and Contemporary Discourses amongst Muslims*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2010, 1–30, at 30.



My point, then, is that the normative conceptual language of modern analysis has failed to take cognizance of the fact that the idea of Revelation to Muhammad *necessarily* contains within itself, comprises, and implies the dimensions and domains of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—and that the engagement of Muslims with Revelation has, as a matter of historical fact, encompassed engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text. Much of the semantic and analytical inadequacy of modern conceptualizations of Islam arises from the fact that, by and large, modern actors (both Muslims and non-Muslims) are unaware that when one invokes the category of “Revelation,” or “Divine Communication,” one is *conceptually* obliged to think in terms of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—and thus to think in terms of the *consequences* (for Muslims) of the fact of Islam-as-Revelation-as-Pre-Text-Text-and-Con-Text. If we are to come to meaningful terms with human and historical Islam, we need to apprise ourselves fully of and habituate ourselves readily to thinking in terms of this multi-dimensionality of the idea of Revelation to Muhammad as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text.

I conclusively propose, therefore, that we conceptualize human and historical Islam as *hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation to Muhammad*. Thus, when we conceptualize Islamic hermeneutics, we must do so in terms of all of *Pre-Textual hermeneutics, Textual hermeneutics, and Con-Textual hermeneutics*. It will be seen in what follows that by conceptualizing Islam as *hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation to Muhammad* we become able to map our concept of Islam readily and coherently onto the differentiated and contradictory landscape of human and historical Islam in a manner that locates the logic of internal contradiction, thereby allowing us to see how contradictory statements and actions made by various claimants to Islam actually cohere meaningfully to their putative object—Islam—as well as to understand how Muslims are able to entertain and live with these contradictory statements and actions *as* Islam.



To conceptualize the Revelation of Islam as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—as Muslims have done as a matter of human and historical fact—is to conceptualize Revelation to Muhammad as a *multi-dimensional* phenomenon. Simply, Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text are *different spatial dimensions* of the Revelatory

structure.¹³⁴ In this way, it comes readily into view that, in such a structure, the *Truth and Meaning of Islam must also be multi-dimensional/multi-spatial*. To speak of Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muhammad—meaning Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—is necessarily to speak of Islam in terms of *hermeneutical engagement with different spaces of Revelation*, and thus to speak of a *spatially-differentiated origination, production, distribution and application of Truth and Meaning*. *This spatiality and differentiation within Truth is structurally inherent in and constitutive of Islam*. From the structural fact of this spatial differentiation, we can begin to understand how it is that Muslims have been able to conceive of contradictions of Truth and Meaning as coherent with and coherent within Islam.

We have already, in the foregoing, repeatedly observed the spatial or structural differentiation of sources of Islamic truth as Unseen/Seen and Pre-Text/Text. We have also observed how the respective hermeneutical engagements with the spatially or structurally differentiated sources of Unseen/Seen and Pre-Text/Text are associated with *different modes of production of truth*, or *different epistemologies* present as/in Con-Text. These epistemological modes of production of Truth are differentiated relative to the respective sources of Truth. Thus, as we have seen, Reason, exemplified in the logical syllogism, is the epistemological mode for the hermeneutical engagement of the philosophers with Pre-Textual Reason; it is by this means that philosophers explore and articulate *meanings* of the Truth of the Pre-Text, to which meanings those who engage with the Text alone cannot aspire. The Sufi hermeneutical engagement is not with Pre-Textual Reason or with Pre-Text as Reason, but rather with Pre-Textual Existence or Pre-Text as Existence: hence, experience of body, mind and spirit is the epistemological mode by which the Sufi attains gnostic knowledge of the meanings of the Truth of Pre-Text that lie beyond and behind the Text. Different inflections and combinations of reason and textuality are the epistemological modes for the respective hermeneutical engagements of the lawyers and of the early theologians with Text and Textual Reason (as distinct from the Pre-Textual Reason of the philosophers). We have also repeatedly observed different and contradictory meanings and values given to the same objects of truth: for example, to wine or figural paint-

¹³⁴ H. G. Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext: Critical Issues in Discourse Analysis*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, is a study of the relations between grammar, text and discourse, that uses these terms quite differently to how I am using them. “Texts, Con-Texts, and Pre-Texts” turns out to be the title of Part 2 of Michael M. J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, 93, but despite the appearance of the terms in the section title, the authors do not expound upon them at all.

ing, which are valued as positive in some hermeneutical engagements and as negative in others—the epistemology and spatiality of which polyvalence and polysemy we will soon take up. We have also repeatedly observed the socially-differentiated distribution and application of Truth and Meaning in the fact that the practitioners of philosophy and Sufism declaredly regard their pure truths as not fit for general human consumption—or rather, regard the generality of humans as not fit to consume those pure truths—whereas the practitioners of law regard their truths as being of universal application and actively prescribe them for general public consumption.

Thus, conceptualizing the hermeneutical engagement of Muslims in terms of both *Pre-Textual hermeneutics* and *Textual hermeneutics* enables us to see, in the first instance, how it is that Muslims, according to whether they are engaging in Pre-Textual hermeneutics of Revelation, or Textual hermeneutics of Revelation, or some specifically weighted and Con-Textualized combination of the two, necessarily generate not only different, but outrightly contradictory truth-meanings *as Islam*. And, in the second and more important instance, conceptualizing the hermeneutical engagement of Muslims in terms of both *Pre-Textual hermeneutics* and *Textual hermeneutics* enables us to understand how these truth-meanings are *maintained by Muslims as Islam with the outright contradictions in place*. When we conceptualize Islam as *hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation to Muhammad*, it becomes apparent that these contrary truth-meanings are not merely the result of external accidents and circumstantial vagaries that have impinged upon what would otherwise have been an uncorrupted and authentic hermeneutical engagement of Muslim subjects with Revelation. In other words, it is not the case that these contradictions arise, in the first instance, from the influence on Muslim meaning-makers of factors *extraneous* to Revelation—which is another way of saying that these contradictions do not arise merely from the respective *subjectivities* of Muslim interpreters. If this were the case, then, as the accidents of external contingencies, these contradictions should logically be understood as *not inherently or co-herently Islam(ic)*. But we can now see that these contradictions arise, in the first instance, from the constitution of the very *object* itself of the hermeneutical engagement: which is to say that we can now see that these contradictions arise from the *intrinsic structure and dimensionality* of the fact and *phenomenon* of Revelation to Muhammad. These different truths result, in the first instance, according to whether a particular truth is produced from the hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, or with the Text, or with some combination of both—as well as from which particular related epistemological means and meanings of Con-Text it is by which the hermeneutical engagement is made. Islam as Mus-

lim engagement with Revelation-as-Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text contains already within its very structure and dimensionality the premise and promise of multiple spatially-differentiated truths. These contradictions are not merely *externally contingent*; rather, they are *structurally inherent*.

Fundamental and outright contradictions of Truth and Meaning are thus structurally and logically and objectively internal and intrinsic to Islam. Contradiction hence emerges as not merely inherently Islamic, *but as coherently Islamic: contradiction inheres to and coheres with the spatial-structural dynamic of Revelation to Muhammad*. To engage hermeneutically with Revelation to Muhammad as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text is thus ineluctably to enter one's Self into an activity of truth- and meaning-making in which the production, not merely of polyvalence or polysemy, but of contradiction is a part and parcel of *the structure of the space of the process*: one might say that it simply goes with the territory.

Thus, any individual who lives by making meaning for him/herSelf in terms of Islam as Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text is concomitantly aware that he/she is making the Self in terms of Islam that both contain and *entertain* contradiction—that is to say, *in terms of Islam to which contradiction is inherent, and by which contradiction is made coherent. S/he is making her/himSelf meaningful in contradictory terms. The Self that is made in terms of such a process is thus, necessarily, a Self that has an intimate and profound relationship with and sensibility to contradiction—a Self that can live with contradiction.*

We have seen amply illustrated in the foregoing the historical fact that innumerable Muslims did live by and with Islam as contradictory truths—both within their individual persons, and in society with others. This prodigious fact of Muslims living with and by contradictory Truth indicates the scale at which Muslim individuals and societies have historically been cognizant of the inescapable contradictions of Truth inherent in the Revelatory structure. From the foregoing it becomes possible, at the very least, to understand how the *individual* Muslim might be capable of a negotiation within him/herSelf that enables that person to live in isolated accommodation of contradictory truths. But Islam is not constructed by the individual Muslim alone. The question that must be answered is: how, as a practical and social matter, have entire societies of Muslims been able to live (and may continue to live) with and by contradictory truths as Islam? Whence do the imaginal and social values and mechanisms that enable this collective mode of being—*this social organization of and relationship with truth that enables people to live meaningfully with contradiction as truth*—come? Now, the argument might again reasonably be made that if these social and imaginal mechanisms for

accommodation of contradiction stem from sources external to the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, then the mechanisms themselves are external to Islam and, as such, cannot themselves be understood as Islamic (rather, they function as outside mediators). If this were, in fact, the case, then the modes of living with contradiction that these social and imaginal mechanisms mediate cannot be called Islamic either—rather, they are the contingent expressions of other social resources. It is precisely my point, however, that this is not the case; and that, in fact, the social and imaginal values and mechanisms that enable societies of Muslims to live with and by Islam as comprising contradictory truths and meanings are the direct consequence of the inherent spatial dynamic of the infrastructure of Revelation—and, as such, are intrinsically and categorically Islam(ic).

To explain: when the vast and divergent data of historical societies of Muslims is analyzed in the light of the foregoing conceptualization of Islam as hermeneutical engagement with a multi-dimensional spatial dynamic of Revelation, we find that the structure of this engagement *logically and necessarily* generates truth and meaning—that is to say, Islamic Truth and Meaning—in two main spatially-differentiated trajectories:

- (i) hierarchy, and
- (ii) interiority/exteriority,

which, in turn, are iterated and are operational in five domains of truth and meaning:

- (i) different sources for truth (differentiated, that is, according to hierarchy and exteriority/interiority); related to which are
- (ii) different modes of production of truth, or different methodologies and epistemologies (differentiated, that is, according to hierarchy and exteriority/interiority); resulting from which are
- (iii) different meanings and values of truth (differentiated according to hierarchy and exteriority/interiority); related to which are
- (iv) different social locations or social theatres for the operation of truth and meaning and value, (differentiated according to hierarchy and exteriority/interiority); and
- (v) different expressive registers of truth-, meaning-, and value-discourse, or different types of language used to communicate different types of truth, meaning and value (differentiated according to hierarchy and exteriority/interiority).

It is precisely the spatial differentiation or distribution of Truth and Meaning in *hierarchy* and *interiority/exteriority* inherent to the phenomenon of Revelation that is crucial to the making-coherent by Muslims of contradiction in Islam—and thus to the capacity of Muslims to live with meaningful contradiction as Islam. The spatial differentiation of Truth and Meaning in *hierarchy* and *interiority/exteriority* are crucially constitutive and orientative of notions of cosmology, existence, imagination, body, self, discourse, and society as constituted and identified and enacted in terms of Islam.



To illustrate: one critical iteration and operation of spaces of the *hierarchy* implicit in the Revelatory phenomenon is the notion of higher and lower *levels of Truth and Meaning* that we have seen starkly articulated by philosophical and Sufi discourse in their respective conceptualizations and articulations of Islam. As we have already discussed: one form that this hierarchy of Truth and Meaning takes is *cosmological*—that is, the higher/Unseen/unrevealed and lower/Seen/revealed Truths of the Revelatory hierarchy (understood by philosophy and Sufism in Neo-Platonic emanationist terms).¹³⁵ In another iteration and operation, this hierarchy is also *human-social*: the cosmological notion of higher and lower Truths transposes itself logically into the corresponding *social notion* that humanity and human society is composed of a hierarchy of more- and less-Truth-proficient human souls. This hierarchy of more- and less-Truth proficient souls is, quite simply, a hierarchy of *classes of persons in society*. It is a class hierarchy constituted not by material wealth or political power, but relative to the capacity to *know Truth*.

We have seen in Chapter 1 how the philosophers do not regard the Pure Truths of the Pre-Text as generally suitable to or useful for wider social promulgation in higher form to the limited understanding of philosophically-untrained and -inept greater mass of people; or, to put it the other way, the philosophers do not regard the greater mass of people as generally suitable for these higher truths. Four centuries after Ibn Sīnā, the philosopher Jalālud-Dīn Davvānī (1422–1506) wrote (in Persian) the *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, which

¹³⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr is one of the few scholars to have insisted on the importance of cosmological hierarchy to Islam: “The Islamic intellectual world is a hierarchic one in which the same truths are reflected in differing forms on various levels and modes of understanding ranging from the exoteric law to pure esotericism.” Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, 17. See also his classic: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Safā, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1978 (revised edition).

would become, alongside Tūsi's *Akhłāq-i Nāṣirī*, the most widely-read work of ethics and politics in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. The influence of the work in the Ottoman context may be gauged from the fact that the catalogue of the library of Sultan Bāyezid II, compiled during Davvānī's lifetime, already records six copies of the *Akhłāq-i Jalālī*,¹³⁶ while less than a century later and at the other end of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, Abū-l-Fażl 'Allāmī (1551–1602), one of the "Nine Jewels" at the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, wrote to Bayrām Khān, the Commander-in-Chief (Khān-i-Khānān) of the Mughal armies: "A portion at least of your precious opportunities you should contrive to rescue from the hand of Time, the deceiver; and apply to the study of ethics [*mutālī'ah-i kutub-i akhłāq*]—the essential aim and abstract of the whole round of science [*maqsūd bi-z-zāt-i jamī'-ul-'ulūm ast*]. The works of antiquity [*kutub-i qadim*], indeed, may not, in the present age, be procurable, but the study of the *Akhłāq-i Nāṣirī* and *Akhłāq-i Jalālī* will afford you ample occupation."¹³⁷ Davvānī was strongly influenced by the Philosophy of Illumination (we have already quoted, in Chapter 4, from his

¹³⁶ al-'Āṭūfī, *Daftar al-kutub*, 114. The book is cited in the catalogue immediately after Tūsi's *Akhłāq-i Nāṣirī* as *Makārim al-akhłāq bi-al-fārisiyah* without naming the author. But, given that there is no major Persian-language work on *akhłāq* with this title, this must be the *Akhłāq-i Jalālī*, the proper title of which is *Lawāmi' al-ishrāq fi makārim al-akhłāq*. I am grateful to Hüseyin Yılmaz for drawing my attention to this entry.

¹³⁷ See Abū-l-Fażl 'Allāmī, *Har sih daftar*, 2:22. The continuing importance of the *Akhłāq-i Jalālī* in the Indian subcontinent in the first half of the nineteenth century was recognized by an officer of the East India Company's Bengal Civil Service, who made an abridged translation of the work, which appeared under the the title *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People Exhibited in Its Professed Connexion with the European, so as to Render Either an Introduction to the Other; Being a Translation of the Akhlāk-i-Jalālī, the Most Esteemed Ethical Work of Middle Asia, from the Persian of Fakir Jāny Muhammad Asā'ad (with References and Notes)*, by W. F. Thompson, Esq., of the Bengal Civil Service, London: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1839. Thompson adduced the above passage in translation on the title page of his *Practical Philosophy*, and I have duly left his Victorian rendering untouched. My first-hand experience of collecting early Indian printed books has left me with the strong impression that the *Akhłāq-i Jalālī* was, both in the Persian original and in Urdu translation, the most widely circulated work of the *Akhłāq* genre in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The work was so well-known that early Indian editions either truncate the author's name to the titular "Jalāl," or dispense with it altogether: for example, Jalāl-ud-Dīn, *Akhłāq al-Jalālī*, Lucknow: Naval Kishōr, 1884; and *Akhłāq-i Jalālī*, Lahore: Malik Nazīr Ahmad Tājir-i Kutub, 1936. An Urdu translation was done already in 1805 and published as *Lawāmi'-ul-ishrāq fi makārim-ul-akhłāq urdū tarjamah*, n.p., n.d. (the copy I have seen is missing the title page); another Urdu translation is Muhammad b. As'ad Davvānī, *Akhłāq-i Jalālī* (translated into Urdu by Amānat-Ullāh as *Jāmi'-ul-Akhłāq: tarjamah-'i urdū Akhłāq-i Jalālī*), Lucknow: Munshi Naval Kishōr, 1909, which was still being reprinted twenty years later: *Jāmi'-ul-Akhłāq: tarjamah-'i urdū Akhłāq-i Jalālī* (translated into Urdu by Amānat-Ullāh), Lucknow: Munshi Naval Kishōr, 1931; also Muhammad b. As'ad Davvānī, *Akhłāq-i Jalālī* (translated into Urdu with a commentary authored jointly by Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali "Nāmī" and Sayyid Mahmūd 'Ali "Girāmī" with the title *Nāmī Girāmī sharh-i Akhłāq-i Jalālī*), Meerut: Tijāratī Press, 1915.

commentary on Suhrawardi's *Temples of Light/Hayākil al-nūr*): the title that he gave the book that became famous as the *Akhlaq-i Jalālī* is *Flashes of Illumination on the Virtues of Ethics* (*Lawāmi' al-ishrāq fī makārim al-akhlaq*). He also became well-known to students of the *madrasah* education curricula of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex on account of several commentaries that he authored, one on the popular Sunnī-Hanafi creed ('Aqīdah) of Ādud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355),¹³⁸ another on a foundational text of logic, the *Shamsiyah* of al-Qazwīnī al-Kātibī (d. 1276), and another on a foundational text of dialectics, the *Risālah fī ḥadāb al-baḥth* of al-Samarqandī (fl. 13th c.).¹³⁹ Davvānī wrote:

The souls of men differ in degree according to their capacity for reason and discernment. The highest degree—which we call the celestial soul—is connected to the World of Rationals, while the lowest—which is extreme stupidity—is tied to the beast-pen. It, thus, follows that the perception of these groups in matters of “whence our origin and whereto our return [*mabda' va ma'ād*]”—which are the most subtle secrets of philosophy and *shari'a*—are not at one and the same level.

... The highest class . . . know the Real-Source with all its glorious qualities and beautiful features, and are aware of the issuing forth of the chain of existences from the Source in the actual order . . . By the light of their perception, they apprehend that the Real-Truth lies beyond imagined forms and conjectured meanings [*ṣuvar-i mukhayyalaḥ va ma'āni-yi mawhūmāh*]. This party comprises the great “Friends of God” and the great pillars of philosophy [*hikmah*].

Next to this rank is the class of those who are incapable of understanding for themselves by pure reason [*az ta'aqqul-i şirf 'ajiz bāshand*]. Their journey ends at conjectured meanings. But they know that the Real-Truths, as they actually are, are free of such restrictions. They acknowledge their own incapacity, and defer to the knowledge of the first class of people. This group is the people of faith [*ahl-i īmān*].

Following this rank is a group who are incapable even of conjectural reasoning. Their journey in “whence our origin and whereto our return” does not extend beyond imagined forms. But they defer to the first group, and acknowledge their incapacity. This group is the people of acceptance [*ahl-i taslim*].

And next to this group are the short-sighted ones who cannot even begin to imagine any other level beyond that which can be sensed, and

¹³⁸ Muḥammad b. As'ad al-Dawwānī, *Sharḥ al-Dawwānī 'alā al-'Aqā'id al-'Adudiyyah*, Delhi: al-Maṭba'ah al-Mujtabā'i, 1898.

¹³⁹ For the importance of these works, see Chapter 1.

who stop short at representations and images that are far (from the Real-Truth). These we call the “weak-minded” [*mutaṣa‘afān*].

But so long as each of these exerts himself to the full extent of his ability, and reaches the full limit of his capacity, he will not be stigmatized with falling short, but rather will be regarded as having turned his face towards the *qiblah* of Real-Truth.¹⁴⁰

Davvānī’s frank presentation of a social hierarchy of knowers was no more than a routine philosophers’ statement of the knowledge-order of society. Two centuries before him, Ṭūsī had said the same thing,¹⁴¹ and two centuries later, the great philosopher of Shīrāz, Mullā Ṣadrā, in his book, *Awakening the Sleepers*, again ranked human beings according to their capacity to know Real-Truth [*darajāt ma‘arifi-him li-al-haqq*]:

On the first level are the people of inner revelation [*mukāshafāt*] who know the Truth as the Truth [*ya‘rifūna al-haqq al-haqq*]. By ceasing to be distracted with themselves, and by passing beyond their own specific type of being, they fall in prostration to God and witness His Signs. On the second are the excellent philosophers [*hukamā’*] who perceive Him in a purely rational sense . . . On the third level is the generality of the people of faith [*‘āmmat ahl al-imān*] . . . The most that they are capable of are conjectural conceptualizations [*taṣawwurāt wahīyyah*], so for them “whence our origin and whereto our return” takes the form appropriate to the level of their development and their capacity . . . On the fourth level are the people of acceptance [*ahl al-taslīm*] . . . They are not even capable of conjecture, let alone imagination. Beneath these, are those . . . who can only conceptualize in physical forms.¹⁴²

Similarly, we have seen how Sufis consider that people are differentiated according to their capacity to penetrate the higher hidden Truths of the Unseen. Sufi anthropology divided humans into three basic classes according to their respective attainment of the truths of the Unseen: the “commoners” or

¹⁴⁰ Jalāl-ud-Din Davvānī, *Akhlaq-i Jalālī* (edited by ‘Abd-Allāh Mas‘ūdī Ārānī), Tehran: Intishārat-i Itṭilā‘at, 1391 sh [2012], 244–245. Compare the translation by Thompson, *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People*, 367–370.

¹⁴¹ See Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣiri*, 281–283; and the translation by Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 212–213.

¹⁴² Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī Mullā Ṣadrā, *Īqāz al-Nā’imīn* (edited by Muḥammad Khwānsārī), Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmi-yi Ṣadrā, 1386 sh [2007], 108–109 (compare the translation by Sajjad H. Rizvi, “Mysticism and Philosophy: Ibn ‘Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā,” in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (editors), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 224–246, at 232–233).

‘awāmm, the “elect” or *khawāṣṣ*, and the “elect-of-the-elect” or *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*. These classifications were a part of the very infrastructure of Sufi cosmology and anthropology. For example, one of the most widely-used manuals of instruction for Sufi initiates, the *Stations of the Wayfarers* (*Manāzil al-sā’irin*) of Khwājah ‘Abd-Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 1089, the very title of which contains the concept of a *hierarchy* of “stations” on the journey of ascent towards absorption in the Divine Truth) “divides almost every Sufi concept he addresses, from God’s unicity (*tawhīd*) to spiritual discipline (*riyāda*) into the three levels of *‘amm*, *khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*.¹⁴³ Typically, the Sufi, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996), states that every Qur’ānic verse has seven meanings: (1) external/exoteric (*zāhir*) for the common people (*‘awāmm*); (2) internal/esoteric (*bātin*) for the elect (*khawāṣṣ*); (3) indications (*ishārat*) for the elect of the elect (*khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*); (4) significations (*amārāt*) for the friends of God (*awliyā’*); (5) subtleties (*laṭā’if*) for the truth-full (*siddiqūn*); (6) intricacies (*daqā’iq*) for the lovers (*muhibbūn*); (7) realities (*haqā’iq*) for the prophets (*nabiyyūn*).¹⁴⁴ As a Sufi commonplace, this notion of the division of humanity into a class-hierarchy of knowers of Truth—and of Truth in a class-hierarchy according to its knowers—was also a commonplace of the cosmological and anthropological imagination of all those historical societies of Muslims seized by and participant in the prolific discourse and practice of Sufism.

And it is not just philosophy and Sufism that were informed by the notion that particular types of knowledge were the preserve of particular types of people. *Kalām*-theologians regularly cautioned against exposing the common people to the knotty questions and intractable debates that were the staple of speculative theology—as exemplified in the title of the representative work by the seminal al-Ghazzālī, *Restraining the Commoners from the Science of Theology* (*Iḥjām al-‘awāmm ‘an ‘ilm al-kalām*). Speculative theology is no good for commoners—for whom the appropriate truth is unambiguous prescriptive creed—and the commoners are no good for speculative theology. It is only the discourse of law that regarded its truths as fit and necessary for universal public consumption—or rather, regarded the universal public as fit for the consumption of its “necessary” truths (but certainly not for the production of

¹⁴³ See Jonathan A. C. Brown, “The Last Days of al-Ghazzālī and the Tripartite Division of the Sufi World: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī’s Letter to the Seljuq Vizier and Commentary,” *Muslim World* 96 (2006) 89–113, at 104.

¹⁴⁴ These are cited by Yaman, *Prophetic Niche in the Virtuous City*, 126, from Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Ilm al-qulūb* (edited by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Daqr and Muṣṭafā Ibrāhim Ḥamzah), Damascus: Maktabat al-Fārānī, 1998, 42. I have followed Yaman’s arrangement but have amended some of the translations of the terms.

them).¹⁴⁵ Otherwise, the division into ‘āmm and khāṣṣ was also the basic taxonomical principle of the Shī‘ah who, throughout their history have referred, somewhat self-congratulatorily, to themselves as the *khāṣṣah/elect* on the basis of their knowledge of *true Islam* (and of their constituting an elect demographic minority), and, somewhat disparagingly, to the Sunnīs as the ‘āmmah/commoners on the basis of their majoritarian ignorance of true Islam.

We have already encountered al-Ghazzālī’s statement that whereas “most people say that there is only one *madhab* [way of going] which is to be believed and proclaimed in teaching and guidance by all human beings howsoever their states may differ,”¹⁴⁶ those few who know better are aware that that *madhab* “varies and changes and is according to each person in the terms of that of which his understanding can bear.”¹⁴⁷ The principle of different registers of truth for different people—that is, the idea that society is comprised of a hierarchy in which people are arranged according to their capacities to *know*—was commonplace in pre-modern societies of Muslims. The social mobilization of this idea as a principle of discursive action is expressed in the axiom, consistently invoked down the centuries, “Speak to people according to the capacity of their intelligence [*kallimū al-nāsa ‘alā qadr ‘uqūli-him*]”—or, strictly speaking, “their *intelligences*” (plural: *‘uqūli-him*), meaning that they have different levels and types of intelligence—which is precisely a principle that posits a normative discursive-social hierarchy. A detailed history of the invocation and significance of this axiom is a historical desideratum; I will here note just four significant instances. In the *Akhlaq-i Naṣīrī*, the historically foundational text for the conceptualization of practical philosophy (*hikmat-i ‘amalī*) in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, Tuṣī, having noted that “faculty of discernment [*tamyīz*] and reason [*nutq*] has not been created equally in all men, but rather in varying grades [*marātib-i mukhtalif*],” goes on to state, “The Possessor of the Law is appointed to perfect the community as a whole, and is, in accordance with the principle, ‘Speak to the people ac-

¹⁴⁵ As one scholar observes: “For scholars studying pre-modern Islamic societies . . . the distinction between ‘āmmah and khāṣṣah is *omnipresent* in the sources, which were mostly written by eminent ‘ulamā’ who expressed their normative perception of social order and affirmed the distinction between ‘āmmah and khāṣṣah that might have been a widely used pattern of understanding of society.” Thomas Herzog, “Mamluk (Popular) Culture,” in Stephan Connerman (editor), *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies—State of the Art*, Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2013, 131–158, at 133 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁶ *al-aktharūn yaqūlūna al-madhab wāhid huwa al-mu’taqad wa huwa alladhi yunṭaq bi-hi ta’liman wa irshādan ma’ā kulli ḥadāmiyyīn kayfa-mā ikhtalafā hālu-hu*, al-Ghazzālī, *Mizān al-‘amal*, 408.

¹⁴⁷ *al-madhab . . . yataghayyar wa yakhtalif wa yakūn ma’ā kullu wāhid ‘alā ḥasab mā yaḥtāmilu-hu fahmu-hu*, al-Ghazzālī, *Mizān al-‘amal*, 407.

cording to the capacity of their intelligence,’ able to bring each person to perfection in the measure of that person’s capacity.”¹⁴⁸ This was duly reiterated two hundred years later by Davvānī in his *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*.¹⁴⁹ And another two hundred years later, in his *Balance of Truth in Choosing the Most True*, Kātib Çelebi advised the mosque-preachers of Istanbul (*khatibs*): “Sermons are for the commons (*‘evāmm*), not the select (*hawāṣṣ*); so do not fail to observe the *sunnah* of ‘Speak to the people according to the capacity of their intelligence.’”¹⁵⁰ The commonplaceness of the linking of this principle to Divine discourse is nicely brought together in a simple calligraphic tableau in my possession (see Figure 4, acquired from Damascus and dated 1289 *hijrī* =1872), which contains the following three lines of text: at the top, the Qur’ānic verse, “And God is the Master of his matter—but most people do not understand”,¹⁵¹ in the middle, the Qur’ānic declaration, “Truly, there is for you in the Messenger of God, a beautiful model,”¹⁵² and, at the bottom, “Speak to the people according to the capacity of their intelligence.” The first quotation from the Qur’ān emphasizes the incomprehensibility to most people of God’s relationship to His affairs, the second (a particularly beloved Qur’ānic verse) emphasizes how the Prophet provides a mimetic means to virtue (whether or not one understands the nature of God and His affairs), and the third emphasizes that one should not try to give people more knowledge or understanding than they can handle. Which leads me, actually, to add a fifth textual example: Kātib Çelebi’s contemporary at the other end of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, Khwushḥāl Khān Khātak, begins his book of instruction by invoking and glossing “Speak to the people according to the capacity of their intelligence” in terms his fellow Pashtuns will readily understand: “It makes no sense to give the morsel of a lion to a cat.”¹⁵³

Beginning at least with the foundational work of political philosophy in the history of Muslim societies, *The Excellent City (al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah)* of the seminal Abū al-Naṣr al-Fārābī (870–959) who “distinguishes between the

¹⁴⁸ Ṭūsī, *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, 281 and 283 (compare the translation of Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 212 and 214).

¹⁴⁹ See the re-iteration of this by Davvānī, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, 245–247 (translated by Thompson, *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People*, 370–371).

¹⁵⁰ Kātib Çelebi, *Mizān-ul-haqq*, 150 (compare the translation of Lewis, *Balance of Truth*, 149).

¹⁵¹ *wa Allāhu ghālibun ‘alā amri-hi wa lākin akthar al-nāsi lā ya’lamūna*, Qur’ān 12:21 Yūsuf (I have italicized “understand” to reflect that, in the tableau, the calligrapher has written the word *ya’lamūna* in a much smaller script than the rest of the verse, as if to require the reader to complete the recitation of the verse from his/her own memory).

¹⁵² *la-qad kāna la-kum fī rasūli Allāhi uswatun ḥasanah*, Qur’ān 33:21 al-Aḥzāb.

¹⁵³ *da mazaray nimray pishū tah rōghah karī da ‘aql nah dē*, Khwushḥāl Khān Khātak, *Dastarnāmah*, 9.

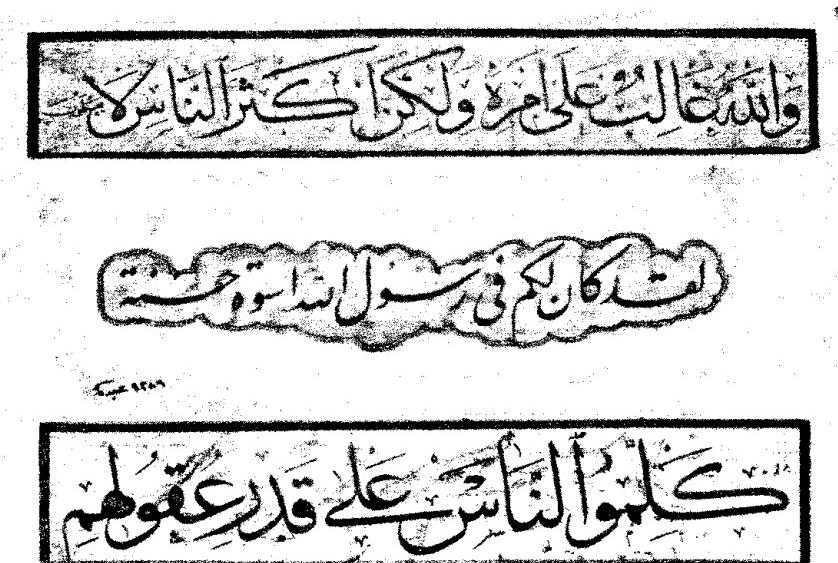


FIGURE 4. Calligraphic tableau dated 1289 *hijri* (1872), probably done in Syria, containing three panels of text. At the top, “And God is the Master of his matter—but most people do not *understand*” [Qur’ān 12:21 Yūsuf]; in the middle, “Truly, there is for you in the Messenger of God, a beautiful model” [Qur’ān 33:21 al-Ahzāb], and, at the bottom, the saying “Speak to the people according to the capacity of their intelligence!” (From the collection of the author).

élite (*khāssah*) and the commoners (*‘āmmah*), the former being composed of those who possess superior knowledge and understanding . . . while the latter do not possess such gifts,”¹⁵⁴ the historically-dominant socio-political theory of Muslims (at least prior to the modern era) continued frankly to do the same. The *khāssah* are, by virtue of their superior knowledge and understanding, more capable of governing themselves; the *‘āmmah*, owing to the lack of the self-same qualities, are not—if left to their own devices, without legal prescription, proscription and supervision, they will descend into chaos. The *‘āmmah* must therefore be governed and kept in an orderly state by the law administered by the *khāssah* in the interest of the welfare of all. It is impor-

¹⁵⁴ The statement about al-Fārābī is from one of the few studies directly to address the subject of the concepts of *‘āmm* and *khāss* in Islamic history: Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 54. Marlow’s is a useful first step beyond which there has not been much done.

tant to stress that, while hardly enfranchising, this notion of society and polity is neither discriminatory as regards fundamental public legal rights, nor does it posit any ontological difference between persons—since the distinguishing human quality is *knowledge*, which is something potentially susceptible to *acquisition* by all people by means of textual and experiential education (according to differential aptitude). Thus, this notion of the structure of society and polity, *which proceeds directly from the structure of Revelation*, comprises values both of hierarchy and values of egalitarianism in a functioning concourse. The historical persistence and pervasiveness—indeed, *normativity*—in historical societies of Muslims of this defining conceptualization of human society and polity comprising a hierarchy constituted in terms of knowledge of truth is a defining and highly-consequential feature of the conceptualization, thought and practice by Muslims of Islam—but remains one of the least recognized (and least studied) features of the societies and cultures and Muslims.¹⁵⁵

My point is not that hierarchy is somehow the authentic or the only possible expression of Islam: but rather that hierarchy is at least every bit as *Islamic* as is the egalitarianism which we habitually associate with Islam.¹⁵⁶ This idea of *social* hierarchy in terms of Truth is embedded in the idea of cosmological hierarchy in terms of Truth and, as such, proceeds directly from

¹⁵⁵ A rare article to address the subject is that of Nikki Keddie, who sets out by saying that “Medieval Muslim thinkers of various schools . . . tended to think that society was inevitably divided into an elite which was capable of understanding the full truth and a majority of persons who were not capable of such an understanding, and for whom education in the ways of truth might be more harmful than helpful,” and notes squarely that “the growth within Islam over the centuries of a belief that a full understanding of truth is necessarily restricted has often been remarked upon, but has not been adequately studied,” Nikki R. Keddie, “Symbol and Sincerity in Islam,” *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963) 27–63, at 27, and 44. I disagree with several of Keddie’s primary analytical formulations and judgements—I do not, for example, find her vocabulary of “dissimulation” and “hypocrisy” helpful for conceptualizing a truth that is stately conceived of as inherently differentiated—but the article very much warrants reading.

¹⁵⁶ The usual view, expressed, e.g., by Louise Marlow, is to distinguish between the authentic “egalitarian ideal” or “notion of equality that lies at the heart of Islam,” and the impingement upon that ideal *from the outside* of various ideas and forms of hierarchy which resulted in “rationalizations of inequalities” (see Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism*, xi, 6, and 143). Another perspective is to view hierarchy as an “incorporating principle” into Islam of elements of non-Islamic provenance: “some kind of hierarchical ordering had been one way that alternative values and practices were incorporated into the Islamic tradition” (the distinction here is between “Islam-derived and alternative codes”), Katherine P. Ewing, “Ambiguity and *Shari’at*: A Perspective on the Problem of Moral Principles in Tension,” in Katherine P. Ewing (editor), *Shari’at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 1–22, at 7 and 2. My point is that the logic of the hierarchy/inequality of knowers of Truth is *structurally inherent* in the concept of Revelation as Pre-Text and Text, and is thus neither a post-facto rationalization nor a socio-political device.

the structural logic of Pre-Text and Text of Revelation in which higher truths are sent down to a lower world. As such, this idea is, for all conceptual and analytical purposes, squarely *Islamic* at source—and has been considered such by those generations and nations of Muslims who have conceived of humanity in these *hierarchical terms of Islam*. When we seek to conceptualize and analyze Islam, we need to be mindful of these *hierarchical consequences of Revelation*.



Also of direct consequence for the conceptualization and social relationship with Truth in societies of Muslims is the fact that the Truth of Revelation is spatially structured in terms of the domains of the Unseen and Seen. In this trajectory, the spatiality of Revelation presents itself as the spaces of *exteriority/Seen/shahādah* and *interiority/Unseen/ghayb*.

There are at least two different major pairings of spaces of exteriority and interiority that are structurally inherent to and socially characteristic of human and historical Islam. One pairing, to which scholars of Islam have devoted some attention, is the exteriority and interiority of Text: that is, the differentiation and distribution of Truth and Meaning of Text into esoteric/Unseen (*bātin*) and exoteric/Seen (*zāhir*). I should like, however, to direct attention to another iteration of the interiority/exteriority of Truth to which much less attention has been paid but which is, in my view, of paramount importance for the conceptualization and understanding of human and historical Islam: this is the differentiation and distribution of Truth and Meaning into the exteriority and interiority of *physical and social space*. The deepest interiority of physical and social space is, of course, the ultimate, intimate, secret interiority of the individual Self. The notion of *secret* (Arabic: *sirr*; Persian: *rāz*) is simultaneously one of the most important, and least studied, elements in Sufi discourse: it is at the level of *sirr*—of the individual’s most intimate self—that the most subtle and *meaningful* experiences of Divine Truth take place.¹⁵⁷ It is for this reason that the standard invocation made after one mentions the name of a deceased Sufi “Friend of God” is *qaddasa Allāhu sirra-hu*: “May God Purify his secret!” The consequences of this idea for the conceptualization of Divine Truth in Muslim societies that are permeated and suffused by Sufi discourses, ethos and practices (such as is the case in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex) is, again, one of the least considered elements in

¹⁵⁷ The standard designation for truths experienced and known in interiority are designated is *latā’if* or “subtleties.”

the history of societies of Muslims.¹⁵⁸ The fact that the most subtle and profound Truth is also the one experienced in the most secret *space of Revelation* gives rise to a dilemma: should this Truth be divulged and communicated for the benefit of others, or not? If it is to be divulged: then to whom, and in what form? On the one hand: if the truth is not revealed, then those people capable of benefitting from that truth are deprived of the opportunity. On the other hand, if the truth is revealed to those incompetent to its *meaning*, then both the speaker and the listeners are imperiled: “The mass of people, prisoners of their own ignorance, can only become violent if the secret is revealed to them, even if only partially.”¹⁵⁹ The dangers attendant for the speaker upon revealing such a pure Truth to those unqualified to receive it are, of course, exemplified in the fate of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, martyred for his proclamation, “I am the Truth,” whose crime, according to the Sufis, is *ifshā-yi sirr*—“disclosure of the secret.” In this way, the fact of the judicial execution of Hallāj (or of Suhrawardi, or ‘Ayn-ul-Quzāt al-Hamadānī, or any other Sufi martyr) *does not invalidate the Truth of their profession*. The application to these Sufi knowers of the public truth of law is of no consequence whatever for Truth. It is thus as a martyr for Truth and as the “discloser of the secret” that Manṣūr became known in proverbial literary convention. In a famous couplet representative of many others like it by many other poets, Hāfiẓ invoked Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj without taking his name:

He said, “That friend by whom the head of the gallows was raised high:
His crime was only this: that he divulged the secrets!”¹⁶⁰

The idea of higher and more secret truths was not, however, confined only to rarefied Sufi discourse. Thus al-Ghazzālī said by way of broad advice, “That which a person believes in his innermost-secret self is between him and

¹⁵⁸ There is remarkably little study of the significance of secret/secrecy for Islam. Three exceptions are Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Siri,” in P. J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (editors), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. Volume XII. Supplement*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004, 752–754; Annemarie Schimmel, “Secrecy in Sufism,” in Kees W. Bolle (editor), *Secrecy in Religions*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987, 80–102; and Ali Sharif Kashani, “Le Secret et le Paradoxal en littérature mystique persane: Réflexion sur deux aspects fondamentaux de la mystique irano-islamique,” *EurOrient* 21 (2006) 3–22.

¹⁵⁹ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Siri,” 752, citing three famous works (of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex), the commentary on the *Gulshan-i Rāz* of Shabistari by Muhammad b. Yaḥyā Lāhijī (fl. 15th century); the commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn ‘Arabī by Dāwūd al-Qaysarī (d. 1351), and the dictionary of scholarly terminology of ‘Abd al-Nabi b. ‘Abd al-Rasūl Ahmadnagarī (fl. 1759).

¹⁶⁰ *guft ān yār k-az-ū gasht sar-i dār buland / jurm-ash ān būd kih asrār huvaydā mikard*; Hāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, ghazal 136.

God . . . he should not mention it other than to someone who is his peer in having attained to awareness of that of which he is aware, or to someone who has reached the level where he can attain to awareness and understanding of it.”¹⁶¹ The notion— inherent in and proceeding from the idea of Revelation—that there are classes of human beings differentiated according to their greater and lesser capacity to know higher and lower registers of the Truth, and that higher classes of truth are not suitable for circulation among lower classes of knowers, *necessitates*—as a matter of structural and social logic—that those capable of higher truths should have available for them existential spaces where they can meet to discourse and transact and otherwise explore in terms of higher truth. The logic of Revelation necessitates, in other words, separate physical and social domains of *public/Seen physical and social space* and *private/Unseen physical and social space* as *differentiated spaces* for the social elaboration and operation of *spatially-differentiated truths and meanings*. This differentiation of Truth and Meaning in terms of physical and social space is effectively a differentiation of Truth and Meaning in terms of what we can call *private and public discursive-performative space* or *private and public Truth-space* or *private and public meaning-making space* since these physical and social spaces are precisely *spaces for the social discourse and practice of Truth and Meaning*.

It cannot be emphasized enough, however, that, as a space for *discourse*, what I am calling “*private discursive space*” is very much a *social space*—that is to say, it is a space not of individual secrecy, but rather a restricted collective space in which for people to gather in private society for discourse (and performance) of Truths not appropriate to unrestricted common and public space and society. As such, it is a sort-of *public-private* space, or a *private-public* space. It is, precisely, the communicative space of a more-or-less self-constituting class of persons who *mutually recognize* the capacity of their peers to entertain and deal with the communication and practice of complex, and often contradictory, exploratory truths. Thus the act of meaning-making is *personal* in that it is made in the individual self, *public* in that it is communicated to others, and *private* in that it is communicated to a limited and qualified public.

This mutual recognition requires, of course, that there be something that makes people mutually recognizable. That something is, by and large, a shared education productive of shared attitudes to the nature of Truth. It is, in other words, “the whole intellectual and spiritual world revealed by educa-

¹⁶¹ *mā ya‘taqidu-hu al-rajul sirran bayna-hu wa bayna Allāh . . . wa lā yadhkuru-hu illā ma‘a man huwa shariku-hu fī al-it‘tilā‘ ‘alā mā iṭṭala‘a aw balagha rutbatan yaqbūl al-it‘tilā‘ ‘alay-hi wa yafshamu-hu*, al-Ghazzālī, *Mīzān al-‘amal*, 408.

tion into which any individual is born” that makes the one person recognizable to the other as a *partaker* in the discourses and practices and meanings of contradiction in terms of Islam—whether of philosophy, Sufism, figural painting, wine, or whatever. “The whole intellectual and spiritual world revealed by education into which any individual is born”¹⁶² is how the great classicist, Werner Jaeger, defined the Greek concept of *paideia*—basically the concept of the formation of ideal persons in society. In the history of societies of Muslims, the concept of *paideia* is centrally and self-consciously present in the term *adab*, or “cultivation,” which, Tarif Khalidi notes, “refers to a process of moral and intellectual education designed to produce an *adib*, a gentleman-scholar, and is thus intimately connected with the formation of both intellect and character . . . Where the strictly religious sciences aimed increasingly at consensus and conformity, *Adab* tolerated an ever-widening spectrum of individual taste and critical judgement.”¹⁶³ One might say of this social class of Muslims constituted by *adab* what Tim Whitmarsh said about *paideia* in Roman Greece; that *adab* “gave access to resources of rhetorical sophistification which could enable the speaker to generate nuances and subtexts which may have had *different meanings for different readers*.”¹⁶⁴ This social class constituted by a shared *adab* of different meanings may be demographically relatively larger or smaller according to the specific historical and social conditions of a given society; similarly that social space can be physically relatively larger or smaller according to the specific historical and social conditions of a given society. In some historical instances this space of contradiction might be very small indeed—in which case we might say that it is more a *private-public* space—either because the *paideia* of that time and place is not one that encompasses contradictory norms, or as voluntary matter on the part of its practitioners, or because it is perceived by those responsible for the mainte-

¹⁶² See the classic work of Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (translated from the second German edition by Gilbert Highet), New York: Oxford University Press (2nd edition), 1945, 1:303 (first published as *Paideia: Die Formung des griechischen Menschen*, Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1934). The history of Islamic *paideia* has yet to be written.

¹⁶³ Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 83, and 89. See also the discussion in George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, especially at 88–117.

¹⁶⁴ T. Whitmarsh, “Reading Power in Roman Greece: The *Paideia* of Dio Chrysostom,” in Y. L. Too and N. Livingstone (editors), *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 192–213, at 194 (cited in James E. Montgomery, “Convention and Cognition: on the Cultivation of Emotion,” in Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond [editors], *Takhyl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2008, 147–178, at 177), *italics mine*.

nance of public space as a threat to public welfare.¹⁶⁵ I venture that most twenty-first century societies of Muslims are societies the prescriptive and monovalent nature of the canonical texts and practices of whose *paideia* does not allow for more than a narrow space for the entertainment of contradiction in terms of Islam.

In other historical instances—such as, I venture, that of the historical Balkans-to-Bengal complex in the period 1350–1850—the space of exploratory contradiction is very large indeed and, as a practical matter, embraces a wide swath of society. One might say in such an instance that it is more of *public-private* space. What makes it larger in this case is the historical fact that the *adab* of the societies of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex was considerably constituted by normative texts and discourses that explore and express meaning in terms of contradiction. These are the normative texts and discourses of the philosophical-Sufi amalgam adumbrated in Chapter 1—whose influence radiated and diffused into wider social strata both through the spread of institutions and canons of education, of organizations and canons of affiliation and praxis, and vernacularizing and popularizing performances and canons of literature. One might say that such societies are characterized by more-or-less *open secrets*.

Several observers of societies of Muslims have noted the operational importance of the public-private divide for the spatial separation of contradictory norms.¹⁶⁶ What analysts have not been able to identify and conceptualize is what it is that allows for this divide to be conceived of as *consistent with*

¹⁶⁵ The notion of a small, defensive, truth-space of private society that is under severe threat of persecution by the authorities is, of course, the well-known thesis of Leo Strauss who conceived of the historical project of Islamic philosophy in these terms (see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1952). My point is that, by and large, this private space was *not*, in significant periods and geographies of the history of Muslim societies, either particularly small, or particularly threatened. On the Strauss' thesis, see Massimo Campanini: "Strauss' thesis is unacceptable . . . not one of the Islamic philosophers . . . was ever persecuted for his philosophical ideas . . . Further more, it is well known that the majority of Islamic philosophers lived in powerful court circles, enjoying the sovereign's protection," Massimo Campanini, *An Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, 68.

¹⁶⁶ See, e.g., Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 57–63 (the chapter entitled "What about privacy?"), also 129, 141–144; and Sami Zubaida, *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2011, 157–174 (the chapter entitled "The Public and the Private in Middle Eastern History and Society"). A normative argument is made by Iranian reformer Mohsen Kadivar, "An Introduction to Public and Private Debate in Islam," *Social Research* 70 (2003) 659–680. A survey article is Ludwig Ammann, "Private and Public in Muslim Civilization," in Nilüfer Göle and Ludwig Ammann (editors), *Islam in Public: Turkey, Iran and Europe*. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2006, 77–125.

Islam—that is to say, what it is that allows for this divide to be conceived of as *Islam(ic)*—in the absence of which this public-private divide emerges as not much better than a general state of hypocrisy. Thus, Rudi Matthee concludes a richly documented study of *Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History* with the statement:

Islam demands from its adherents not so much belief . . . as conformity. To belong to the community implies following its precepts in public . . . Because public deviance affects fellow believers and ultimately undermines Islam itself as a communal faith, Islam requires its followers to comply with the rules of the public sphere as well as to be vigilant in their maintenance. Yet its spokesmen have been forced to make multiple concessions to reality in their pursuit of the perfect community. The existence of a private sphere of sorts, or what Michael Cook calls a contingently private sphere—in reference to behavior that contravenes the Islamic law but that is tolerated as long as it does not entail harming others and remains indoors—has always made life livable in Muslim societies, allowing people to behave as they wished while maintaining the pretense that society continued to pursue the ideal.¹⁶⁷

My point, however, is that the private-public divide is *not* a device or a “concession” by which to “connive”¹⁶⁸ against the “pretense” of the Islamic ideal: rather, *it is the conceptual and social enactment of the Islamic ideal as embedded in the inherent spatiality of Revelation*. The more-or-less *private discursive-performative and social space of contradiction* is called into existence and maintained as a social reality precisely so as to fulfil the existential need of Muslims for *a theater for the exploration and communication of the complex possibilities and dimensions of truth and meaning that arise necessarily from the phenomenon of Revelation*—possibilities of truth and meaning that Muslims explicitly recognize might potentially disorder and destabilize the existential certitude and salvific prospects of society-at-large where people are intellectually and temperamentally less well-educated, less well-prepared and less well-disposed *to live with contradiction*. The central significance to the historical constitution of societies of Muslims of *private discursive-performative space*—and thus the significance of “private discursive-performative space” to the conceptualization of human and historical Islam—is a subject that war-

¹⁶⁷ Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 296. The reference is to the magisterial work of Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹⁶⁸ Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 298.

rants study beyond the scope of this book (and that I am taking up elsewhere). For the purposes of this book, it is sufficient to note that the paramount social institution for the performance of private discursive space was the *majlis*—literally, “sitting”—denoting the gathering of people in private society for conversation and other communicative action; for which reason these gatherings came, in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, also to be known by the term *sohbat*—meaning both “conversation” and “companionship.”¹⁶⁹ That the *social gathering* of the *majlis*/sitting of *sohbat*/conversation-and-companionship was definitively conceived of in these societies of Muslims as a performative space for *private* discourse possessed of its own ethos and value is illustrated in the oft-invoked axiom attributed to the Prophet as a Hadith: “*Majlises are a trust [al-majālis bi-al-amānah]*.”¹⁷⁰

The inherence and centrality of what we might call the spatial economy, or social geometry, of distribution and application of truth to human and historical Islam is neatly reflected in the fact that whereas, for the projects of philosophy and Sufism, the socio-spatial question is the extent to which their truths should be asserted in *public* (the private and elite being their structurally logical domain), for law the question is the extent to which its truth should be asserted in *private* (the public being its structurally logical domain). Or to reformulate the issue: whereas for the law the question is to what extent *private norms* should, *as a legal matter and on legal grounds*, be allowed to deviate from public (legal) norms; for philosophy the question is to what extent *public norms* should, *as a philosophical matter and on philosophical criteria*, be allowed to deviate from private (philosophical) norms; and for Sufism the question is to what extent *public norms* should, *as a Sufi matter and on Sufi criteria*, be allowed to deviate from private (Sufi) norms. The public and egalitarian nature of Islamic legal truth is the transposition into social, physical and discursive space of its one-dimensional hermeneutical engagement with

¹⁶⁹ For a fuller treatment of the concept of ‘private discursive space’ and of the social operation of institution and practice of *majlis* and *sohbet* in a particular historical society, that of the Ottomans, see the chapter entitled “Private and Public” in Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire*.

¹⁷⁰ My point is not that this Hadith played a straightforwardly prescriptive role—i.e., I am not saying that Muslims respected the discretion of *majlis* conversation merely because this Hadith existed—but rather that the fact of the regular invocation of this Hadith and the application of the principle associated with it indicates that the *value* expressed by the Hadith was central to the social operation of Truth and Meaning in societies of Muslims. The Hadith appears in the canonical collection of Abū Dā’ūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash’ath al-Sijistānī al-Azdī (d. 889), *Sunan* (edited by Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamid), Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabi, 1935, 4:267–268; as well in other major collections, including Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, Beirut: n.d., 3:342; Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066), *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d., 10:247.

the Text of Revelation; the private and hierarchical nature of philosophical truth is the transposition into social, physical and discursive space of its one-dimensional hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text of Revelation; whereas the more-or-less private or more-or-less public nature of Sufi truth is the transposition into social, physical and discursive space of its two-dimensional hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text and Text of Revelation. The law is squarely a public, objective, non-hierarchical and socially-actionable truth: it is squarely *a prescriptive project for the ordering of the domain of the Seen*; whereas philosophy and Sufism are, in different ways, *explorative projects for the apprehending of the domain of the Unseen*. Theology prescribes in public, and explores in private.

The private-public ordering of meaning informs and is constitutive of all the discourses of Muslims. Perhaps it is this very spatial infrastructure of meaning in the self-expression of societies of Muslims that the great art historian, Oleg Grabar, described in the following moment of genuine insight:

The pertinent “Islamic” categories by which any one object or architectural ensemble is to be understood should not lie in a religious-secular contrast but rather in a public-private one, whereby mosques, commercial ensembles, or most ceramic types represent a realm accessible to all the Faithful, even in large part to the non-believers who belong to the culture at large, whereas miniature paintings, crystals, palace-villas, belong to the private, often unique world, of any one individual . . . the public realm tends to prefer generalised forms with few concrete meanings, while the private realm can be as uniquely specific as the paintings of Qusayr Amrah with their often un-understandable references or the specific iconography of the Demotte *Shahnama*. In a particularly deep sense, this public-private dichotomy with any number of intermediary steps would indeed correspond to the fascinating and hardly institutionalised Muslim notion of a unified corporate *ummah* together with the uniqueness of every one Believer’s actions.¹⁷¹

It seems to me that what Grabar is here grasping at is precisely the phenomenon whereby the *objets d’arts* of societies of Muslim are spatially arrayed with different levels of meaning according to whether the objects are for public or private view: simpler and less meaning-*ful* (“generalised forms with few concrete meanings”) in the case of objects of the public, and more subtle

¹⁷¹ Oleg Grabar, “Islamic Art: Art of a Culture of Art of a Faith?” *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 13 (1978) 1–6, at 4.

and complex in meaning in the case of objects of the private (“specific . . . uniqueness . . . with any number of intermediary steps”). But while Grabar says that this phenomenon is a “hardly institutionalised Muslim notion,” my point is that the *universal spatial iteration of this arrangement of truth and meaning in societies of Muslims is itself the institutionalization and operationalization of the categories of public and private as Islamic categories.*

To restate: this transposition of the spatiality of the Truth of Revelation into public and private discursive space is *inherent* to the structural and social logic of Revelation-as-Pre-Text-and-Text; it is a necessary requirement for the social operation of the idea of higher and lower truths available to higher and lower knowers which is itself, as we have seen, inherent to the Revelatory structure. Once we understand this, we are able to see that the differences between public and private norms in societies of Muslims emerge not as random, *ad hoc*, opportunistic, or “hypocritical” floutings of a monovalent and one-dimensional value system, but rather as the *coherent* logic and structural consequences of a multivalent and multi-dimensional value system whose multivalency and multi-dimensionality is spatially elaborated precisely and necessarily and coherently through hierarchy and interiority/exteriority—that is, through the social arraying of truth and persons into *khāṣṣ* and *‘āmm*, high and low, private and public. The *conceptual and semantic link* between the Truth as hierarchy and the Truth as interiority/exteriority is evident in the fact that in Arabic (as well as in Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Urdu) the self-same pairing of terms, *khāṣṣ* and *‘āmm*, are used definitively both for social hierarchy and for social interiority/exteriority. Thus *khāṣṣ* means both “the elect class of knowers” and “private (space),” while *‘āmm* means both “the commoners” and “public (space).” The one meaning is semantically tied to and conceptually evocative of the other meaning. The truths of the elect knowers are thus *per vocabulum* the truths of private space, while the truths of the common knowers are *per vocabulum* the truths of public space. Thus, when discourse and actions leave the space of the private/high/*khāṣṣ* (in whatever way that may be constituted in a given society of Muslims) and enter into the space of the *‘āmm*/lower/public (in whatever way that may be constituted in a given society of Muslims), those discourses and actions *become* *‘āmm*/lower/public—and must in that space be governed by the normative truths and values of *‘āmm*/lower/public space. When discourse and actions remain in the space of the private/high/*khāṣṣ* they are unaffected by the normative truths and values of *‘āmm*/lower/public space—and are in that space governed by the normative truths and values of private/high/*khāṣṣ* space. Thus, the fact that a particular discourse or practice is an élite or private one does not disqualify it from representativeness of Islam; to the con-

trary, it is representative precisely of the interiority/exteriority that is a part of the spatial structure of Islam.

No attempt to come to terms with the “diversity” and contradictions of the discourses of Muslims, no attempt to understand the historical capacity of Muslims to live coherently in society with contradictory Truth-statements in terms of Islam, can hope conceptually or analytically to succeed without taking into account the centrality of the fact of the *inherent spatiality of Revelation and its consequences for Islam*.



Before moving on to consider the fifth exemplification of the spatiality of Revelation—namely, the different expressive registers of truth-, meaning-, and value-discourse, or different types of language used to communicate different types of truth, meaning and value (differentiated, again, according to hierarchy and exteriority/interiority)—it will be instructive to take a preparatory pause to reiterate a couple of related points made earlier.

In the foregoing, I have repeatedly *separated* out, for purposes of analysis and illustration, the major intellectual projects and discourses of philosophy, Sufism, law, and theology. I have spoken also of what I have variously called discourses of individual and collective self-conceptualization, self-exploration, self-expression and self-communication; discourses which often take the form of *fiction* in prose or poetry—forms of communication that are usually called “literature” or the “literary”—in which regard I have highlighted the prolific literature of what is called the *madhab* of Love. However, I would like now to remind the reader that it is of fundamental importance *not* to enter into the mental habit of thinking of these projects and their practitioners as somehow discursively and socially sealed off from one another—that is, as hard-shelled bodies that only bump into each other to clash or repel. To the contrary: in the lived experience of a Muslim, these projects and discourses *intercommunicate and interpenetrate*. It is of signal conceptual importance to bear in (the front-and-center of) one’s mind that the range of hermeneutical engagements represented by these various projects and discourses (and others: such as art and architecture, as noted briefly above, or, indeed, music, to which we will shortly turn)—encompassing their practitioners and practices, their readings and texts, their prosopographies and communities, their geographies and histories, their values and dispositions, their rituals and practices, their narratives and judgements, their ethics and aesthetics, their methods and truths, their means and meanings—in the *plenitude and complexity of their agreements and contradictions*, all entered into the Con-

Text and were thus all (at least potentially) available in the differentiated palette and vast lexicon of the Con-Text for enlistment and mobilization and affiliation and synthesization by the individual Muslim actor (or collectivity of Muslims) in any given time and place.

Over the passage of the centuries, the structurally inherent multi-dimensionality and multi-valency of Pre-Text and Text was continually worked out by Muslims in an ever-expanding and increasing complex Con-Text of Islamic meanings (as Gadamer tells us, “Language is constantly being formed and developed, the more it expresses its experience of the world”).¹⁷² As this vocabulary of complexity and multi-dimensionality was worked into Muslims’ self-expression, and as the texts produced by that self-expressive impulse circulated across the *Dār al-Islam*, and down the centuries, what were initially local and specialized dialects of complex meaning-making acquired more and more speakers in different settings—we have seen the diffusion of this language of complexity across different levels and spaces of society in the singing of the *kāfīs* of Bullhē Shāh and of *Khwājah Ghulām Farīd* in the tomb-shrines of the Indus valley, and of the *ghazals* of Bidil by the peasants of Central Asia. As such, over the course of time, the increasing semantic complexity and multi-dimensionality arising from the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation was deposited in the regular lexicon of Islamic meanings as the idiom and vocabulary of Islam—this complexity and multi-dimensionality of Truth and meaning simply became *part of the language*. And, by the speaking of this language of Islam, awareness of the potentialities for the self of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of Truth and meaning grew in individual Muslims, and spread across societies of Muslims at large.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 415.

¹⁷³ As J.G.A. Pocock has so eloquently pointed out, “Texts, whether individually or cumulatively, act upon the languages in which they are performed: as they perform they inform, injecting new words, facts, perceptions, and rules of the game; and, whether gradually or catastrophically, the language matrix becomes modified by the acts performed in it,” J.G.A. Pocock, “Texts as Events: Reflections on the History of Political Thought,” in J.G.A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 106–119, at 114 (first published as an article in 1987). Further: “discourse: that is, as a sequence of speech acts performed by agents within a context furnished ultimately by social practices and historical situations, but also—and in some ways more immediately—by the political languages by means of which the acts are to be performed. These acts are to be thought of as performed upon and modifying the status of (1) the hearers or readers to whom the speech is communicated (2) the speaker or writer ‘himself,’ who is never unaffected by ‘his’ own act . . . (3) the language-structure which is confirmed or modified by the act of speech and by the conditions in which it is performed . . . (4) of how the political and historical situation, or the political and social structure, may be said to be modified by the act of utterance performed in it . . . This discourse is conducted in a context of shared languages, consisting in a variety of language games which arise over time; they are specialized to perform rhetorical and paradigmatic functions related to the conceptualization

In short, as we move forward through the centuries, the thought and discourses of Muslims become both increasingly composite as regards the conversation between the different intellectual projects, and more complex as regards meaning. Thus, the more exposed that a particular Muslim or a particular society of Muslims is to this hermeneutical range of means and meanings *as Islam*—that is, the more diverse the Con-Text in any given context—the more that individual Muslim must within his or her person, and the more society of Muslims must within its social body, negotiate with that range of contradictory truth-claims for a *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* that is the *islām* of that Muslim or those Muslims.¹⁷⁴ Michael Sells has written of Ibn ‘Arabi that he “brings together in textual interplay the language worlds of classical Islamic civilization: Arabic poetry, scholastic theology (*kalām*), hermetic sciences (astrology, alchemy and magic), Islamic law, and the various modes of Sufi literature.”¹⁷⁵ My point is that the language of the discourses of Muslims of the period and places of the fullest historical maturation of Islam (i.e., the Balkans-to-Bengal complex) is precisely about this “textual interplay”—and that this “textual interplay” is not at all confined to the rarefied likes of Ibn ‘Arabi. Rather, it this textual interplay—which is precisely the formulation and use of a language suited to the expression of polymathy and of polyvalency—which is at once the cultivated and habitual mode of

and conduct of politics; and they become media of both speech and dispute and are capable of being modified by the speech acts performed in them,” J.G.A. Pocock, “The Reconstruction of Discourse: Towards the Historiography of Political Thought,” in J.G.A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 67–86, at 67 and 81 (first published as an article in 1981).

¹⁷⁴ A highly revealing and symptomatic example of a Muslim making such a negotiation between contradictory truth claims is the great al-Ghazzālī. “Al-Ghazālī is a most difficult author, if not an outright impossible one, to understand in any coherent manner . . . Certain orthodox beliefs and certain philosophical doctrines remained permanent elements of al-Ghazālī’s mind, sometimes in blatant contradiction; the one side may gain prominence over the other according to the people he was addressing . . . neither had he ever embraced the whole of philosophy and given up orthodox beliefs even before his ‘return,’ nor after his ‘return,’ did he ever give up certain philosophical tenets even they contradicted the orthodox position,” Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 94 and 99. Thus, on the one hand al-Ghazzālī anathemized Ibn Sīnā, but on the other hand, “what al-Ghazālī sought, in effect, was to reshape Sunnī theology, to extend it in scope and in depth, and ‘to bring it up to date’ by employing a neo-Platonic model which he took from Avicenna,” Richard Frank, “Al-Ghazālī’s Use of Avicenna’s Philosophy,” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 55–57 (1987–1989) 271–285, at 285. It is striking that a dedicated study of al-Ghazzālī’s treatment of ethics characterizes it as “a *composite* theory of ethics in Islam” (italics mine); Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazālī: A Composite Theory of Ethics in Islam*, Petaling Jaya: Quasem, 1975. The discursively and experientially wide-ranging, synthetic and highly personal nature of al-Ghazzālī’s Islam is examined in the thought-provoking study by Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of the Imagination*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 63.

meaning-making and communication of Muslims negotiating the contradictions and multi-dimensionality of the Revelatory complex of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text.

A crucial part of the elaboration and operation of a *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of contradiction is *necessarily* the development and use of *language* that is able meaningfully to contain, express, explore and communicate contradiction—to do this both within the self and with others. The fact that Revelation as a phenomenon comprises the structural spatiality of a truth-hierarchy that is both cosmological and social, as well as the structure of interiority/exteriority that transposes itself into private and public discursive space, as well as the spatiality of a vast lexicon of often contradictory truth-claims produced from a variety of hermeneutical engagements, *requires* that the language by which Muslims engage with, explore and communicate the meanings of Revelation should *necessarily* possess a suppleness, resourcefulness and multi-dimensionality—in short, a *semantic capacity*—suited to its complex task. My point is that, historically, Muslims did precisely produce and speak and communicate in such a language: they have produced and spoken and communicated in a language of *metaphor* and *paradox*.

A developed consciousness in societies of Muslims of the operation of the metaphor as an explorative mode of meaning-making is evident already in the foundational Arabic literary theory of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078), which makes metaphor its central subject, and which takes as its data the transmitted corpus of Arabic poetry of the preceding four hundred years.¹⁷⁶ I very much doubt that there is any community of discourse in the history of the world whose individual and collective language of self-exploration, self-expression and social communication—that is, whose language of individual and collective meaning-making—is as extensively, prolongedly, pervasively, and routinely *metaphorized and paradoxical* as is the literary idiom of Muslims; especially the prodigious Persian, Ottoman, Urdu, and Arabic literatures of the Muslims of the half-millennium and half-world of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. The ubiquitous and rich metaphorization and paradoxization that perfuses the discourses of the Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is not something that needs demonstration (it is, at once, the bane and boon of long-suffering generations of students of Persian, Ottoman, and Urdu literature). This rich metaphorization and paradoxization is symptomatic precisely of the maturity of the discourses of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex as explorations and articulation of Islam; that is, as hermeneutical engagement with

¹⁷⁶ See 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Kitab asrār al-balāghah* (edited by Helmut Ritter), Istanbul: Government Press, 1954; on which see the important study by Kamal Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1979.

Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text (as Erich Auerbach observed, “figural interpretation is the product of late cultures, far more indirect, complex, and charged with history”).¹⁷⁷

The historical culmination of the metaphor as a means of meaning-making is to be found in the mode of literary self-expression known (retrospectively, and somewhat misleadingly) as the *sabk-i hindī*, or “Indian form,” that proliferated throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex in the poetry of all three of its major literary languages (Persian, Ottoman, Urdu) from the late-sixteenth century onwards; a mode of self-expression characterized, as that *ustād* of Urdu and Persian poetry, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, has said, by “ambiguity, obliqueness, metaphoricity, wordplay, verbal congruity, and similar creative devices”:

The chief achievement of the Indian Style poets was to *treat metaphor as fact* and go on to create further metaphors from that fact. Each such metaphor in turn became a fact and was used to generate another metaphor. Metaphor thus became a phenomenon not merely of substitution but of contiguity. Metaphor, in other words, became syntagmatic, rather than paradigmatic. This is perhaps the single greatest innovation in the realm of metaphor in any poetics, but it hasn’t been given the attention it deserves.¹⁷⁸

Let us first understand that metaphor enables words—and *the users of words*—to go beyond a single level of meaning (the literal) so as to generate complex meanings (and complexes of meanings) beyond the literal limitations of formal definitions. Or, to put it slightly differently, metaphor, by way of form, enables the generation of meaning beyond form: “metaphoric language . . . tends to destroy or conflate, or change the nature of the categories that it

¹⁷⁷ Erich Auerbach, “Figura” in Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the European Drama: Six Essays*, Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973, 11–76, at 57.

¹⁷⁸ See the masterful article by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-e Hindi*,” at 32–33, and 73 (also recommended reading in this regard is the introduction to the first volume of Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Shi'r-i shōr-angēz: ghazaliyāt-i Mīr kā intikhāb mufaṣṣal muṭāli'ah kē sāth*, New Delhi: Tarraqqī-yi Urdū Biyūru, 1990, 3:49–136). On the prolificness of *sabk-i hindī* in Ottoman self-expression, see the detailed study by İsrafil Babacan, *Klasik Türk Şiirinin Son Baharı: Sebk-i Hindi (Hint Üslûbu)*, Ankara: Akçağ, 2012. The poetic act of “taking metaphor as reality” has been noted for earlier Arabic poetry by Johann Christoph Bürgel, who adds that this was to “effloresce only later and much more conspicuously in Persian poetry,” Bürgel, *The Feather of Simorgh*, 65. The full potential of Bürgel’s highly original monograph for the conceptualization of human and historical Islam is somewhat undermined by his focus on the idea of *magic* rather than on *meaning*.

deals with.”¹⁷⁹ In metaphor, words are able to say something other than what they mean—or mean something other than what they say; they are able to reach beyond themselves. Of this al-Jurjānī, who was deeply concerned in his foundational theory with what he called the “form of meaning,” or *ṣūrat al-ma‘nā*, was already aware when he made the distinction between “meaning [*ma‘nā*]” and “meaning of meaning [*ma‘nā al-ma‘nā*]”: “*Ma‘nā* means what you understand from the immediate expression [*zāhir al-lafz*], and what you can reach without a special medium [*wāṣiṭah*]. *Ma‘nā al-ma‘nā* is that you comprehend a certain meaning from the expression, and this meaning leads you to another meaning.”¹⁸⁰

The point is that this capacity of metaphor to create complex meaning beyond and behind the plain meaning which is visible at the surface is precisely what renders metaphor so crucial to the process of meaning-making and communication amongst people for whom Truth is multi-dimensional and multi-valent—as meaning-making and communication necessarily is for Muslims engaging with the spatiality of Revelation. In the structural hierarchy and internality-externality of Revelation, metaphor thus functions as a means by which Muslims reach upwards, inwards, and outwards beyond the form of the word. It allows precisely for the *multi-dimensional exploration of meaning(s)*.¹⁸¹

We need, therefore, to understand metaphor and paradox in the self-expression of Muslims as possessing a significance quite beyond the strictly “literary,” “aesthetic,” or “ornamental” significance that is generally ascribed to it.¹⁸² As that incomparable master of metaphorical expression, Ghālib of Delhi, said in no uncertain terms when summing up the explorative efforts of

¹⁷⁹ Faruqi, “A Stranger in the City,” 24.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb Dalā’il al-Ifjāz* (edited by Muhammad ‘Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Ridā), Cairo: al-Manār, 1366 h [1946] (3rd edition), 203; cited by Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani’s Theory of Poetic Imagery*, 75 (I have very slightly varied Abu Deeb’s translation).

¹⁸¹ Salim Kemal has noted: “The metaphor is ambiguous not in having no clear meaning at all but is rather polyvalent in the sense of having a set of possible meanings,” Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës: The Aristotelian Reception*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2003, 213. Kemal’s study of the “poetic syllogism” contains a rare attempt to consider the larger social implications of metaphor: see the chapter entitled “Poetics, Morality and Society” at 128–173. Otherwise, there is excellent scholarship on the technical and literary aspects of metaphor in the literatures of the Islamic world; for example, the afore-cited monograph of Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani’s Theory of Poetic Imagery*; Deborah L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle’s Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990; and Landau, “Naṣir al-Din Tūsī and Poetic Imagination in the Arabic and Persian Tradition.”

¹⁸² As Kemal Abu Deeb noted of the metaphor: “enrichment of the meaning is its *raison d’être* . . . not as an embellishment or mere ornament. The poet creates *isti’ara* as a functional element which alone is capable of expressing the affinity he apprehends between two entities,” Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani’s Theory of Poetic Imagery*, 200 (italics mine).

the innumerable practitioners of his revelatory craft, “Brother, poetry is the *creation of meaning*; it is not the measuring out of rhyme!”¹⁸³ Paul Ricoeur noted that “In the case of metaphor . . . the interplay between resemblances and differences . . . gives rise to tension at the level of the utterance. It is precisely from this tensive apprehension that new vision of reality springs forth, which . . . thus makes way for the revelation of a new dimension of reality and truth . . . metaphor implies a tensive use of language in order to uphold a tensive view of reality.”¹⁸⁴ In the language of meaning-making in terms of Islam, the tensive view of reality and truth arises directly from the *location of tension* in the structure of the spatiality of Revelation: metaphor enables the creation and exploration of meaning while maintaining the tension—that is, without the structure breaking apart but, instead, with it holding together, or *cohering*.

We need to understand, precisely, that metaphor and paradox are necessary means by which Muslims negotiated and accommodated and expressed the complexity and contradictoriness of Truth and Meaning inherent in the spatiality of the Revelation of Islam. Lakoff and Johnson wrote in their foundational work on metaphor, “The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture.”¹⁸⁵ In the case of the Revelation of Islam, we have an instance where *metaphor itself is a fundamental value* cohering with the (metaphorical) structure of the fundamental concepts. *Metaphor and paradox are, in other words, of key semantic and existential significance to Muslims’ meaning-making.* We need, then, to take seriously Muslims’ *modes of saying* (which are also *modes of doing*) when we seek to understand Muslims’ *modes of being*. When Muslims *speaking and acting as Muslims*—that is, speaking and acting consciously in terms of Islam—on a prolific and idiomatic scale, make mean-

¹⁸³ *bhā’i shā’irī ma’nā āfrīnī hay qāfiyah paymā’ī nahīn hay!* Ghālib’s statement of the meaning and meaningfulness of poetry was sternly underlined for me (quite literally so: with a pen!) in my copy of Alṭāf Ḥusayn Ḥālī’s classic *Yādgār-i Ghālib* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī-i Adab, 1963, 194) many years ago in Kuala Lumpur by my teacher of Urdu, the late poet of Peshawar, Khātīr Ghaznavī (1925–2008): it is with fond memories of him that I adduce it here. Ghālib wrote this in one of his numerous letters to his (Hindu) friend, Munshi Har Gōpāl ‘Taftah’; see Ghālib, *Khutūt-i Ghālib* (edited by Ghulām Rasūl Mihr), Lahore: Majlis-i Yādgār-i Ghālib Panjab Yūnivarsī, 1969, 1:115. Much of Faruqi, “A Stranger in the City,” is about *ma’nā āfrīnī*, a subject which he also treats at length in his *Shīr-i shōr angēz* (there is also a discussion of it in the book by Faruqi’s student, Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, 106–110, where Ghālib’s dictum is also cited—the translation may be compared).

¹⁸⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976, 68.

¹⁸⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 22.

ing metaphorically and paradoxically, we need to understand the dynamic of truth and meaning of metaphor and paradox to be expressive of those Muslims' conceptualization(s) of Islam, and to make it part-and-parcel of our conceptualization of Islam.¹⁸⁶ We need to understand that metaphor and paradox are not merely *ornaments*; they are also *uses* (that is, *means*) and *meanings* of Islam.

We also need to understand that metaphor and paradox are not merely discursive configurations of meaning, but are also *praxial* configurations of meaning: that is to say that it is not only words that can be made meaningful in terms of metaphor and paradox, but *actions* as well. Thus, an eighteenth-century Javanese text, the *Sirat Cabolèk*, tells the story of a Sufi, Haji Mutamakin, who "disclosed the knowledge of the Unseen [gaib], revealing the secrets of the knowledge of Truth [kak=haqq], holding to the Real-Truth [kakekate=haqiqat] and casting aside the Law [saringatipun=shari'at]" for which he was brought on trial before the King. "Said the king . . . how come the one who speaks of the Unseen World comes to follow Buddha-ways?" Haji Mutamakin replied, "This is not a bad thing according to the teaching of the science of Truth [kak] for it is only taken as a metaphor [tamsil], and not as the creed itself. Many such metaphors [ondhe-ondhe] were used by all the Friends of God. It [Real-Truth] is revealed through representation [upama]."¹⁸⁷ The point here is that Haji Mutamakin's "metaphor" is *his (paradoxical) actions*; i.e., his "casting aside [buwang] the Law" and following "Buddha-ways"¹⁸⁸—by which he reveals the Real-Truth.

¹⁸⁶ Thus, when the anthropologist Katherine Ewing, in addressing the psychologists' concept of "cohesive self—that is, the experience of wholeness that derives from a symbolic constitution of the self and the phenomenon of rapid shifts in the content of that experience," notes that "the object of anthropological studies, namely cultural concepts of self, is a component of the content of that experience of wholeness" and calls for a "focus on how multiple self-representations are organized, contextualized and negotiated in dialogue," my point is that metaphor and paradox are central to the organization and dialogic negotiation by Muslims of a self made cohesive in terms of Islam; see Katherine P. Ewing, "The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self, and the Experience of Inconsistency," *Ethos* 18 (1990) 251–278, at 274.

¹⁸⁷ amēdharkén kawruhu kang gaib ambuka rarasanan ngelmu kak angukuhu kakekate buwang saringatipun . . . iku kapaya wong micara ngelmu gaib téka ngirip laku buda . . . pukulun botén kasiku mēnggah raosing ngelmu kak pan naming dinamél tamsil botén dinamél ing tekad sami ngalap ondhe-ondhe kathah para waliyolah kabuka ring upama, S. Soebardi, *The Book of Cabolèk: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation and Notes, A Contribution to the Study of Javanese Mystical Tradition*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975, 66, 73 (compare Soebardi's translation); also cited in M. C. Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java, 1726–1749: History, Literature and Islam in the Court of Pakubuwana II*, Honolulu: University of Hawa'i'i Press, 1998, 141–143 (compare Ricklefs' translation).

¹⁸⁸ Nancy Florida points out that "Buda, in Javanese, does not specifically designate the Buddha. 'Buda's way' . . . 'tata Buda' denotes the multiplicity of pre- (and non-) Islamic religious complexes in Java (Buddhism, Hinduism, animism and syncretic blends of the three)," Nancy K.

As with “public and private,” the significance of metaphor and paradox in the historical elaboration of the meaning(s) of Islam in the “literary” discourses of societies of Muslims is an underconsidered subject that warrants study beyond the scope of this book (I am taking it up elsewhere).¹⁸⁹ My purpose here is to draw attention to the centrality of metaphor and paradox in the processes of meaning-making by Muslims in terms of Islam. Let us, then, move forward by noting that metaphor is not allegorical-symbolical language or code wherein words (or actions) stand in for other words with which they have no necessary semantic relationship. Rather, in metaphor, a word or action projects and assimilates semantically to another thing to which it stands in a semantic relationship of *simultaneous sameness and difference; from which thing and meaning it is differentiated at the very same time as with which it is identified*. As the authors of the foundational work of the modern field of metaphor studies have written, “*the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*”¹⁹⁰ (the italics are theirs). This is something of which, evidently, Muslims historically have been profoundly and intimately aware. In the case of metaphor in the literary discourses of Muslims, the two kinds of things that are understood and experienced in terms of each other are the truths and meanings of the Seen material world of forms, on the one side, and the truths and meanings of the Unseen transcendental world-beyond-forms, on the other. These worlds were identified precisely in the discourses of Muslims as the Unseen World of Real-Truth (*‘ālam al-haqīqah*) and the Seen World of Metaphor (*‘ālam al-majāz*). This idea likely first took firm root in Sufi thought, but eventually—through the diffusion of the philosophical, Sufi, and literary canons that lay at the heart of the *paideia* of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex—established itself as a part of the infrastructure of Muslims’ conceptualization of the cosmos and Existence. In this trajectory of the spatiality of Revelation, the Seen world itself stands in relation to the Unseen world as metaphor does to Truth. *The Seen world is itself a metaphor*: it is the World of Metaphor the experience of which evokes and alludes to the Real-Truth of the Unseen world—the World of Real-Truth, the *‘ālam al-haqīqah*. Real-Truth is *configured* and *delimited* in the forms of the Seen world: the True Meaning(s) of Real-Truth lie beyond and behind this configuration—by means of which Real-Truth may, nonetheless, be reached.

Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 94 note 9.

¹⁸⁹ See the chapter entitled “Modes of Saying, Modes of Being” in Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire* (forthcoming).

¹⁹⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

This relationship between the World of Metaphor and the World of Real-Truth is summed up in the Arabic axiom invoked from one end of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex to the other: *al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqah*, “Metaphor is the Bridge of Real-Truth.” The ubiquity of this principle in the literature of self- and collective-expression of the Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is amply illustrated in the numerous literary examples assembled and studied by the Iranian scholars, Jalāl Sattārī,¹⁹¹ and Naṣr-Allāh Pūrjāvādī¹⁹² (though there is, to my knowledge, no study of this axiom in any Western language). This under-examined yet *proverbial* invocation—this prodigiously-circulated and *normative* truth-statement—is a discursive, praxial, existential and cosmological principle that encapsulates a conceptualization of the spatiality of Revelation’s Truth and Meaning that we may observe to be extensively operative in historical societies of Muslims. This conceptualization is precisely the expression of the spatiality of Revelation whereby the metaphor serves as the experiential-imaginal means by which we are able to transport ourselves from the truth-and-meaning of the Seen World to the Real-Truth-and-Meaning of the Unseen World. As the philosopher, Mullā Ṣadrā of Shirāz, said of earthly=metaphorical love:

The Form is the representation of the Real-Truth [*al-ṣūrah mithāl al-ḥaqīqah*]; the body, in what it is, corresponds to the soul and to its qualities; metaphor is the bridge of Real-Truth [*al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqah*] . . . This metaphorical love . . . is a virtue the practitioner of which must mediate between [*yatawassat bayn*] pure distinction-making reason [*al-‘aql al-mufariq al-mahd*], and between the animal soul.¹⁹³

Consciousness of this principle pervaded the most popular theme of the most popular form of literary self-expression—the discourse of love-poetry—ingrained in which was the idea of a *meaningful* relationship between “metaphorical=earthly love” for a beautiful person whose pure beauty is witness to pure Divine Truth and who is thus known as “The Witness (*shāhid*)”, and “Real-True Love” which ultimately requires no such medium. This is sub-

¹⁹¹ Jalāl Sattārī, *Paymānah-i ‘ishq*, Tehran: Nashr-i Markaz, 1374 sh [1995], the chapter entitled *al-Majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqah* [The Figural/Metaphorical is the Bridge to Real-Truth], at 168–184.

¹⁹² Naṣr-Allāh Pūrjāvādī, *Badah-i ‘ishq*, Tehran: Nashr-i Kārnāmah, 1387 sh [2008], the chapter entitled *Sayr-i tāhavvulāt-i ma‘āni-yi ‘ishq* (*‘ishq-i ḥaqīqī*, *‘ishq-i majāzī*) [The Journey of Transformations of the Meanings of Love (Real-True Love and Metaphorical/Figural Love)], at 181–214.

¹⁹³ Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī, *al-Hikmah al-muta‘āliyah*, 2:173 and 2:175.

tended by the poetical sub-theme of wine-drinking, in which was ingrained the idea of a *meaningful* relationship between “metaphorical=earthly wine” and “Real-True” wine. Consciousness of this principle pervaded the daily individual experience of love which was *informed* by the knowledge that the experience of the truth and meaning of “earthly=metaphorical” love is a bridge to the experience of the Truth and Meaning of Divine Love. Similarly, one might say that the consciousness-altering experience of “earthly=metaphorical” wine is a bridge to the consciousness-altering experience of Real-Truth. In this spatial economy of Truth, the Seen world, in the one meaning, *corresponds* to the Unseen but, in the other meaning, *differs* from it: the forms of the Seen World are *informed* by Real-Truth, but are not the direct form of Real-Truth. Muslims engaging with the spatiality of Revelation thus lived in an intimate consciousness of and relationship with Truth characterized by *ambiguity of meaning* and *ambivalence of value*.

It is this intimate sense of *existential ambiguity and ambivalence*—that is, of the *co-existential difference in meaning and value*—proceeding directly from the spatiality of Revelation that is responsible for the ambiguity and ambivalence that characterizes the literary discourses and social practices of the individual and collective self-expression of Muslims (exemplified in the Ḥāfiẓian expressive mode and ethos). That Muslim poet-practitioners and their audiences were completely aware of the mutually-informing relationship between the experiences of the lower Seen/Metaphorical world and higher Unseen/Real-Truth world, of the role of metaphor as a bridge to the attainment of Real-Truth, and also completely aware that theirs was a project for the formulation of *language* by which hitherto unknown *existential meanings* might be explored and expressed, may most economically be illustrated as enfolded into the semantic repleteness of the following two couplets by Bīdil, whose patronymic, *Abū-l-Ma‘ānī*, means “The Father of Meanings.”¹⁹⁴ I will leave the unfolding of these verses to the reader.

The cup of metaphorical love gave rise to the drunkenness of
Real-ization.

The fistful of my blood fretted with passion like Majnūn
—and became Manṣūr!¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ The pairing of Bidil’s patronymic, *Abū-l-Ma‘ānī*, “The Father of Meanings,” with his devastating *nom de plume*, Bidil, “The Heartless,” illustrates perfectly the conceptual coupling of Love and Meaning in the sensibilities of the literary self-expression of his audiences.

¹⁹⁵ *sāghar-i ‘ishq-i majāzam nashah-i tahqiq dād / musht-i khūnam jūsh-i Majnūn mizad va Manṣūr shud*, ‘Abd-ul-Qādir Bīdil Dīhlavī, *Divān-i ‘Abd-ul-Qādir Bīdil Dīhlavī* (edited by Akbar

Oh! What a multitude of meanings, for lack of language intimate with them,

Remain, withal their seductive beauty, hid behind the veils of secret-mystery!¹⁹⁶



To be aware of the spatiality of Revelation is to exist in a Revelatory structure where the Truths inherent to and arising in one space of Revelation both *are and are not* the Truths inherent to and arising in another space of Revelation. In the strongest cases, these spatial differences in meaning and value present themselves as outright opposites and contradictions. When Muslims are confronted with contradictory truth-claims to Islam arising from different hermeneutical engagements with different spaces of the Revelatory phenomenon expressed, in turn, in different normative discourses, they are presented with three possible solutions: either, that one truth-claim is established as Islam and cancels out the other truth-claim as not-Islam (on the basis that the two contradictories cannot both be Islam); or, that both contradictory truth-claims cancel each other out (again, on the basis that they cannot both be Islam); or, that both contradictory truth-claims are brought together in juxtaposition and made to *co-equate and co-exist as Islam*. In this last instance where both contradictory truth-claims are brought together by Muslims and made by them to *co-equate and co-exist as Islam*, *Islam takes the form of paradox*. “Paradox (as well as antinomy and contradiction) makes an equation of two things manifestly unlike . . . in paradox, what is, is and is not.”¹⁹⁷

Bihdārvand), Tehran: Nigāh, 1386 sh [2007], 697; quoted in Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil*, Lahore: Publishers United, 1960, 158 (compare the translation).

¹⁹⁶ *ay basā ma'ni kih az nā-mahramihā-yi zabān / bā-hamah shūkhī mūqim-i pardah-hay-i rāz mānd*, Abū-l-Ma'āni Mirzā 'Abd-ul-Qādir Bidil, *Kulliyāt-i Abū-l-Ma'āni Mirzā 'Abd-ul-Qādir Bidil. Jild-i chahārūm. Chahār 'unsur. Ruq'āt. Nikat*, Kabul: Dapōhīnī Vizārat va Dār-ut-Ta'lif-i Riyāsat, 1344 sh [1965], 34, cited by Faruqi, “A Stranger in the City,” 53 (compare the translation).

¹⁹⁷ Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxica Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, 206. There is a sense in which all metaphor is paradoxical, since all metaphor speaks of something in terms of that which it is not. Simply, if I say “Richard is a lion,” it is self-evidently clear to all and sundry that Richard is *not* the animal known (metaphorically) as “king of the jungle.” However, my statement means that Richard shares with the lion some quality that is constitutive of the lion, but which is not equivalent to the (whole) lion. Perhaps I am saying that Richard (like the lion—and like his metaphorically-titled Crusader namesake), is exceptionally brave. But by saying “Richard is a lion,” rather than simply saying “Richard is exceptionally brave,” I am creating a space for the generation, exploration, and production of meaning by communicative, experiential, and interpretative association, differentia-

Fatemeh Keshavarz, in a thoughtful study of the paradoxical (*mutaqadd*) in the poetry of Rūmī, where she lists as varieties of what she calls “illogical tropes”—“intelligent ignorance,” “juxtaposition of contrasting images,” “oxy-mora,” and “paradoxical *impossibilia*”—has observed, “On an intellectual level, the ability to come to terms with the incongruity of paradox usually results in a more polyvalent vision than one subscribing to the unacceptability of contradiction.”¹⁹⁸ The historical centrality of paradox to Muslims’ conceptualizations of Islam is evident both in the fundamental nature of the objects of comprehension which Muslims have conceptualized in terms of paradox (including, as we shall shortly see, God, *din*, Islam and Unbelief), and in the thorough-going idiomatization of paradox in literary discourses of conceptualization and communication. Paradox is perhaps the definitive conceptual device in the discourses of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex that engage with the fundamental dilemma of the incorrigible relationship that obtains in an emanationist cosmology between transcendence and immanence (indeed, the Sufi-philosophical amalgam is itself, in considerable measure, a paradox—given that a basic motif in Sufism is its view of *reason* as an *inferior* means to Truth!). The discourse of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī which lies at the conceptual heart of this amalgam is riven through by *coincidentia oppositorum* (Arabic: *jam‘ al-addād*).¹⁹⁹ God, for prime example—presented in the Qur’ān as the One God—is conceptualized in the Akbarian discourse as “The One-The Many [*al-wāhid al-kathīr*],” or as “He-Not-He [*huwa lā huwa*].”²⁰⁰ Commonplace, indeed, *idiomatic* in the poetic discourse of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam—that is, in the poetic discourse of the Balkans-to-Bengal *paideia*—is an image vocabulary in which the Truth of Islam is expressed in terms of symbols that appear, at face value, to be fundamentally at odds with Islam: exemplarily, with the idolatry and polytheism condemned by the Qur’ān (and to the

tion, and projection of the concept “lion.” When I say “Richard is a lion,” I am saying “Richard is, at once, a lion and not a lion.”

¹⁹⁸ Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric*, especially the chapter entitled “The ‘Footless’ Journey in ‘Nothingness’: The Power of Illogical Tropes,” at 31–48, the quote is at 31.

¹⁹⁹ “In Ibn ‘Arabī’s world view . . . the world of Being cannot be grasped in its true form except as a synthesis of contradictions. Only by a simultaneous affirmation of contradictories can we understand the real nature of the world . . . The Absolute . . . cannot be grasped except in the form of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Ibn ‘Arabī quotes in support of his view a famous saying of Abū Sa‘id al-Kharrāz, a great mystic of Baghdad of the ninth century: ‘God cannot be known except as a synthesis of opposites,’ ” Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 74–75.

²⁰⁰ On this, see William C. Chittick, “Rūmī and *wahdat al-wujūd*,” in Amin Banani, Richard Hovansian, and Georges Sabagh (editors), *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 70–111, at 76–77; on *al-wāhid al-kathīr* and also on *al-kathīr al-wāhid*, see Su‘ād al-Hakīm, *al-Mu‘jam al-Šūfi: al-hikam fi ḥudūd al-kalimah*, Beirut: Dandarah, 1981, 1162–1164, and 959–960.

extermination of which Muhammad dedicated his Prophetic career). As a widely-circulated sixteenth-century introductory handbook to poetic metaphor—instructionively entitled *The Mirror of Meanings*—says:

Since the idol attains existence from the lights,
Dīn is perfected by worshipping idols . . .
 Since the essence of God reveals itself in the idol,
 idol-worship is a duty of the Path.²⁰¹

Similarly, one of the most popular and fundamental works of the Balkans-to-Bengal *paideia*—a book likely to be read by any educated Muslim in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex seeking foundational literary cultivation—the *Gulshan-i Rāz* (*Garden of the Secret*) of Mahmūd Shabistari (1288–1340), some sense of the importance of which may be obtained from the fact that not less than thirty-five commentaries were composed on it,²⁰² states:

Since Unbelief and *dīn* are both founded on Being,
 Divine Unity is the essence of idol-worship . . .
 If the Muslim knew what the idol really is,
 He would know that *dīn* is in idol-worship
 That man has no use for figurative Islam [*islām-i majāzī*]
 To whom Real-True Unbelief [*kufr-i haqīqī*] has been made manifest.²⁰³

Here, not only is Divine Unity presented as the essence of idol-worship, but Islam is presented as a metaphor or figure, and Unbelief is presented as Real-Truth. I apologize to the reader that it is not my purpose here to explain these

²⁰¹ *chun but az anvār hastī mīshavad / dīn durust az but-parastī mīshavad . . . chwun bih but zāhir shavad zāt-i ilāh / but-parastī gardad ān-jā farz-i rāh, Jamāli-yi Dihlavī, *Mir’at al-ma’āni: The Mirror of Meanings* (edited by N. Pourjavady, translated by A. A. Seyed Gohrab), Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2002, 42 (compare the translation).*

²⁰² H. Ahmet Sevgi, “Gülşen-i Râz,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İSAM, 1988–2013, 14:253–254, at 254.

²⁰³ *chu kufr o dīn buvad qā’im bi-hastī / shavad tawhīd ‘ayn-i butparastī / . . . musalmān gar bi-dānistī kih but chīst / bi-dānistī kih dīn dar butparastī / . . . zi islām-i majāzī gushtah bīzār / kirā kufr-i haqīqī shud padidār, Sa’d-ud-Dīn Mahmūd Shabistari, *Gulshan-i Rāz* (edited and translated by E. H. Whinfield as *Gulshan I Raz: The Mystic Rose Garden of Sad Ud Din Shabistari. The Persian Text with an English Translation And Notes, Chiefly from the Commentary of Muhammad bin Yahya Lahiji*), London: Trübner, 1880, 50–51 of the Persian text (compare Whinfield’s translation at 83–84). Ibn ‘Arabī himself said, “He does not see the Real-Truth in the eye of his witnessing, who does not see the Real-Truth in divining-arrows and idols [lā yarā al-haqqa ‘aynan fi mushāhadati-hi / man lā yarā al-haqqa fī al-azlāmi wa al-nuṣbi],” cited in Nadeem, *A Critical Appreciation of Arabic Mystical Poetry*, 156 (compare Nadeem’s translation).*

paradoxes:²⁰⁴ rather my purpose is simply to point to them, and the ways in which they served for the *conceptual instruction* of that large historical set of Muslims for whom the *Gulshan-i Rāz* of Shabistarī was a fundamental text of the canon of their *paideia*—and for whom paradox was thus a central conceptual device of meaning-making (to the point that the motif of the virtue of idol-worship became a commonplace in the poetry of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex). Paradox, as W. V. Quine reminded us, is a form of argument—“a paradox is just any conclusion that at first sounds absurd but that has an argument to sustain it”—and thus is a “veridical or truth-telling” device.²⁰⁵ That paradox constituted such a ready part of the *habitus* of argumentation and truth-telling of the Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex tells us precisely that many truths for which they argued were paradoxical ones—their meaning could only be made paradoxically. The intimate functioning of the social and literary discourse of Muslims with paradox as argument for truth is nicely summed up in the following couplet of Ghālib in which the use of paradox is both profoundly casual and casually profound:

When nothing was, God was; had nothing been, God would have been;
What sunk me was being—had I not been, what might I have been?²⁰⁶

Here, in the blithe and playful pithiness of two *argumentative* lines, is an exploration of the relationship of God, Existence, Self, and paradox—composed for publication and *recognition of meaning* in a *majlis*-gathering of the poet’s peers.

But, even so, perhaps nowhere is the linking of God, E/existence, S/self and paradox more disarmingly expressed than by the anonymous seventeenth-century Javanese author of *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*:

When there is manifest in you
the Being of God
then you must understand
you are not God
but are not other than [He]
—this is difficult to accept.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ I direct the reader to Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Fidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmūd Shabistarī*, Richmond: Curzon, 1996; also to the chapter entitled “Sufism” in Ahmed and Filipovic, *Neither Paradise nor Hellfire* (forthcoming).

²⁰⁵ Quine, *The Ways of Paradox*, 3 and 5. Quine also points out that paradoxes can be “falsidical.”

²⁰⁶ *nah thā kuchch tō khudā thā kuchch nah hōtā tō khudā hōtā / dubōyā mujh kō hōnē nē nah hōtā mayn tō kyā hōtā*, Ghālib, *Dívān-i Ghālib*, 2:187.

²⁰⁷ *Tatkala njata ing sira / Pangéran iku anané / mangka ngawruhana sira / dudu sira Pangéran*

Difficult, indeed! Unless, of course, one is able readily to conceptualize and to make coherent meaning—as does the anonymous Javanese author—in terms of paradox. This capacity to conceptualize Islam (here, the relationship between the human individual, God, and existence/being) in terms of paradox is, at once, symptomatic of and instrumental for the historically demonstrated capacity of Muslims to live with contradictory truths *as Islam*—that is, to *live with Islam as paradox*. The prolific scale at which and idiomatic virtuosity with which Muslims’ literary discourses employ paradox—which assumes, of course, a capacity on the part of the audiences of this discourse to think readily in terms of paradox—as well as the fundamental nature of the subject matter for which paradox is used, demonstrate for us the centrality of paradox to the processes of *meaning-making in terms of Islam*. I am, of course, not suggesting that other discursive communities do not use paradox but am rather pointing out that, as with other elements in this book, the crucial difference with regard to Islam is that of *centrality* and *scale*. Thus Michael Sells notes in his masterful study on the use of apophatic language from the mid-twelfth to the beginning of the fourteenth century amongst Christians, Jews and Muslims that “apophasis lived on after this period in the post-exilic Kabbalah of Isaac Luria, in the Spanish mystics, in Jacob Boehme, *and widely throughout the Islamic tradition.*”²⁰⁸ Unfortunately, even less attention—indeed, hardly any attention at all—has been paid to the central significance of paradox in the historical constitution of Islam than has been paid to metaphor.²⁰⁹

The fact that the *self*-conceptualization of Muslims *as Muslims*, that is, the *self*-conceptualization of Muslims *in terms of Islam*, and thus the conceptualization by Muslims *of Islam*, is intimately informed by and conscious of paradox is a necessary operational consequence of the spatiality of Revelation. It

/ tetapi dudu lijanipun / éwuh mangké panarima; Johns, *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*, 72.

²⁰⁸ The italics are mine, and they make the point of scalar difference; see Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 5.

²⁰⁹ There is certainly no equivalent study for Islam to that of Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxa Epidermica* (cited above) for the far more minor phenomenon of the paradox in Renaissance Europe. Paradox has received some study as a feature of Sufi discourse: see the above-cited work on the poetry of Rumi by Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric*; also Kashani, “Le Secret et le Paradoxal.” The *shāthīyyāt*, or ecstatic utterances of the Sufis are, of course, a notorious register of paradoxical discourse in Islamic history—but they are viewed as *exceptional* and *aberrant* forms of discourse, rather than as representative of a regular mode of meaning-making; on the *shāthīyyāt* see the excellent study by Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. Surprisingly little attention has also been paid to paradox as a device in the literature of societies of Muslims: exceptions are Jaroslav Stetkevych, “Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 48 (1989) 81–96; and Geert Jan van Gelder, “Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful: The Paradox in Classical Arabic Literature,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 48 (2003) 321–351.

is the spatial structure of Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, and its consequential generation of truth and meaning in various contradictory dimensions and trajectories of hierarchy and interiority-exteriority, that has resulted in the *language* of the discourses of self-exploration and self-expression of Muslim(s') being, on such a prodigious scale and in such a profound degree, so consciously and actively marked by and involved with the theory and practice of *metaphor* and *paradox*. Thus, when Keshavarz writes, “*although* Rumi’s religious conviction was the central core of his poetry, *it did not prevent him from accommodating paradox*,”²¹⁰ I respectfully submit that this precisely misses the point: it is *none other than* Rūmī’s “religious conviction”—Rūmī’s *Islam*—that is the *source* and *cause* of his *need for and use of* paradox.

One of the most revealing instances of the ingrained understanding in societies of Muslims of the need for paradox in conceptualizing and living Islam—of the everyday mode in which Muslims live with an intimate sense of the meaningfulness of ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction—that I have encountered is a story told me from his childhood by a Panjabi Pakistani friend, the son of rural landowners of a medium scale from a village about a hundred and fifty miles from Lahore. When he was about ten years old (in the 1970s), he heard some men arguing over whether someone who accepts the ideas of Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī is a Believer or a *kāfir* (Unbeliever)—which is the old and universal quarrel mentioned in Chapter 1 as to whether Ibn ‘Arabī is the *Shaykh al-Akbar* (Greatest Shaykh) or the *Shaykh al-Akfar* (Most Unbelieving Shaykh).²¹¹ Somewhat troubled, he ran to ask his mother. “It is very simple,” his mother explained (in Panjābi), “He who accepts the authority of Ibn ‘Arabī is a *kāfir*; he who does *not* accept the authority of Ibn ‘Arabī is a *kāfir*. Just bear that in mind!”²¹²

Katherine Ewing, drawing on Michael Silverstein, has spoken of “ambiguity as a reconciling rhetoric” which serves to “reconcile conflicting values and codes for conduct.” She adds, “It is only in specific historical contexts that we can observe the ways in which particular ambiguities are socially significant. Individuals rely on ambiguity as they strategically use language and other cultural media in specific social situations, maneuvering to achieve their social goals.”²¹³ My point here is threefold: first, that in considering ambiguity,

²¹⁰ Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric*, 47 (italics mine).

²¹¹ For this same disagreement as a “hot topic” in public discourse in seventeenth-century Istanbul, see Kātib Chelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 80–83.

²¹² boht siddhī gal hay jērā Ibn-i ‘Arabī nū mānnē ū kāfir, jērā nah mānnē ū vī kāfir. bas ēh nah bhūlnā!

²¹³ Katherine P. Ewing, “Ambiguity and *Shari’at*,” 3. Ewing is drawing on Michael Silverstein,

ambivalence, contradiction, and Islam, we need to pay close attention to the specific and dominant forms of rhetoric that Muslims have used: namely, metaphor and paradox; second, that metaphor and paradox serve not merely to *reconcile* but rather to make contradiction *meaningful*, and thus serve further as a means to *generate* and *retain* contradiction as something coherent with existence; and thus, third, that it is not merely *social* goals that are fulfilled by metaphor and paradox, but *existential* ones.

Let us, once more, leave the last word on the subject to Bīdil:

The consciousness that comprehends black from white:
 Do not fancy that it comprehends the secret of Truth as it really is!
 I spoke a word, but, only after having attained perfection,
 You will comprehend, when you do not comprehend.²¹⁴



At the outset of this book, and of this chapter, I cited the fragment of Heraclitus “They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.” This *metaphor for paradox with harmony* may help us to think further about the condition of coherent contradiction that is Islam. In the one set of hands, we have the “attunement” (*harmonie*) of the lyre where, “the diversity is essential. If the strings stood in mechanical agreement, or if the musician plucked only one string with constant tension, no music could result.”²¹⁵ In the other set of hands, we have the bow, where, “‘as the arrow leaves the string, the hands are pulling in opposite ways to each other, and to the different parts of the bow.’ A single rational intention (in the most literal sense of *intendere*: aiming at a target) is realized by a system in which physical tensions in opposite directions serve both as instance and as symbol for the general principle of opposition. The opposing forces ‘speak as one’ in the flight of the arrow.”²¹⁶ In the case of Islam, the bow is Revelation, inherent in the working dynamic of which is a tension from which arrows of truth can only be re-

²¹⁴ “Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description,” in Keith Basso and Henry Selby (editors), *Meaning in Anthropology*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967.

²¹⁵ *hūshī kih safidī va styāhī fahmīd / mapsand kih sīrr-i ḥaqq kamā-hī fahmīd // guftam sukhāni lik pas az kasb-i kamāl / khwāhī fahmīd chūn nah khwāhī fahmīd*, Bīdil, *Rubā’iyyat*, 287; cited in Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” 49 (compare the translation).

²¹⁶ Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 199.

²¹⁶ Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 198–199, building on the insight of the nineteenth-century classicist, Lewis Campbell, “As the arrow leaves the string, the hands are pulling in opposite ways to each other, and to the different parts of the bow, and the sweet note of the lyre is

leased by pulling the structure back upon itself, harmoniously, but in opposing directions—such that the poles are, in the one action, drawn both away from and towards each other—and then releasing them in various trajectories towards a single meaningful goal.



To recapitulate: to live with outright contradiction, as societies of Muslims historically have done, one must be able to conceive of contradiction in such a way that contradiction is coherent and meaningful in terms of one's paradigmatic values and truths. This is not possible unless a Muslim conceives of contradictory Truth as arising necessarily and directly from the structural and spatial dynamic of Revelation to Muḥammad as Pre-Text, Text, and Context—that is, unless a Muslim conceives of contradictory Truth as coherent with and meaningful in terms of Revelation to Muḥammad. History shows us that Muslims have done this by effectively recognizing that the phenomenon of Revelation necessarily generates (Islamic) Truth and Meaning in two main spatially-differentiated trajectories, namely, *hierarchy*, and *interiority/exteriority*. They have further effectively recognized that these spatialities of hierarchy and interiority/exteriority are iterated and are operational in different domains of truth and meaning according to the sources for truth (Seen/Unseen; high/low), related to which are different methodological and epistemological modes of production of truth (philosophy, Sufism, law, theology, etc), which result in different meanings and values of truth (e.g., negative valorization of wine and figural images *and* positive valorization of wine and figural images), related to which are different social locations or social theatres for the operation of truth and meaning and value (private/public, elite/common); as well as different types of language used to conceptualize and communicate different types of truth, meaning and value (literal/metaphorical/paradoxical). *It is these operative principles of the structure and spatiality of the Truth of Revelation that have enabled Muslims to conceptualize Islam in terms of contradictory meaning-making and to live as Muslims in those contradictory terms of Islam.*

due to a similar tension and retention; the secret of the Universe is the same," Lewis Campbell, *Theaetetus of Plato*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883 (2nd edition), 244.

Applications and Implications

*Coherent Contradiction, Exploration, Diffusion,
Form and Meaning, Modern*

We will show them our Signs on the horizons and in themselves—until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth.

—Qur’ān¹

By CONCEPTUALIZING ISLAM as *meaning-making for the self in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muhammad as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text*—that is, with the entire phenomenon and matrix of Revelation, rather than just the Text of Revelation—we are able, once and for all, conceptually to account for, accommodate and understand the relationship between variety and unity in human and historical Islam—and thus to conceptualize Islam in terms of *coherent contradiction*. Contradiction emerges into view as inherent to, arising directly from, and *coherent with* the spatiality of Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—that is, as dimensionally- and spatially-differentiated expressions of the Truth of Revelation. This conceptualization maps onto the human and historical reality of societies of Muslims in that it enables us to apprehend how Muslims allowed for contrary norms and truth-claims to be seen and lived with as consonant with Islam: that is, as *Islamic*.

The proposed conceptualization of Islam, and the analytical habits that are cultivated by it enable us now to use the term *Islamic* in a clear and meaningful way: *something is Islamic to the extent that it is made meaningful in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muhammad as one or more of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text*. The exemplary problems with which we began in Chapter 1—namely, what is Islamic about Islamic philosophy? what is Islamic about Sufism? what is Islamic about a society perfused by the norms of the

¹ *sa-nuri-him āyāti-nā fi al-āfāqi wa fi anfusi-him hattā yatabayyana la-hum anna-hu al-haqqu*, Qur’ān 41:53 Fuṣṣilat.

Sufi-philosophical amalgam? what is Islamic about the poetry of Hāfiẓ? what is Islamic about Islamic art? what is Islamic about wine-drinking?—now cease to be problems at all. It is evident that what is Islamic about philosophy and Sufism is that they are both hermeneutical engagements with the Pre-Text of Revelation (the one identifying the Pre-Text with Reason, the other with Existence). A society perfused by the Sufi-philosophical amalgam—like the Balkans-to-Bengal complex—is a society in which the notion of the direct accessibility of the Pre-Text of Revelation is simply normative: that the Pre-Text is directly knowable is an idea that people in such a society carry around in their heads and with which they live. A society in which the idea of engagement with the Truth of the Pre-Text is a norm is a society in which people are conscious in their daily lives of the spatiality of Revelation as elaborated in discursive and social hierarchy, and in discursive and social interiority-exteriority. It is a society in which the Truth of Revelation/Islam is conceived as a limitless Reality whose meanings are susceptible to and available for exploration, and not merely as the limited and limiting reality of prescription. It is a society in which the enactment of the principle of meaning-making beyond the letter or beyond the form is found not only in modes of speaking, but in all variety of creative and explorative action; such as by the audience of a figural painting who “aspire to Meaning from the face of the Figure,” or by the wine-drinker who is “The Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical.” It is a society in which the metaphorical truth of this world is conceived as the bridge to the Real-Truth: a bridge on which one is forever crossing back and forth in the act of meaning-making. The society of hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text is a society in which people *explore* and *express* the potential meanings of the Truth of Islam through communicative mechanisms and structures that support the coherent production and maintenance of inevitable tension and contradiction: namely, metaphor and paradox, as exemplified in (but not limited to) Hafizian literature and its definitive mode of speaking, the *ghazal*. It is also a society in which people explore and express the potential meanings of truth by means of social mechanisms and structures that support the coherent production and maintenance of inevitable tension and contradiction, such as the hierarchical differentiation of discursive space into elite and common, and into private and public. The respective subject of each of our diagnostic questions in Chapter 1 now emerges not as an instance of a problem *anomalous to Islam*, but rather as an expression of meaning *constitutive and definitive of Islam*.

A further effect of conceptualizing Islam in this way is that we become able to see that *meaning-making for the self in terms of Islam/as Islam is*, as a

direct consequence of the spatial dynamics of Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, *diffused* through the full panoply of the practices and discourses of societies of Muslims. Conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation should help us to cultivate the *analytical habit* of looking for and locating Islamic norms not in disciplinary isolation, or in the local confinement of the putative domain of the religious/sacred rather than the secular/profane, but as they are in fact generated and articulated in *social and discursive and praxial diffusion in the lives of Muslims*.² This should impress upon us the need to conceive as statements of Islamic meaning, not merely the discourses of law, Hadith, Qur'ānic exegesis and theology, not merely Sufism and philosophy and historiography, but also those pre-eminent registers of meaning-making and self-expression: the imaginative and fictional discourses of poetry, narrative, music and art.³

² A work that helps to expose the reader to this phenomenon of the vocabulary of Islamic meaning diffused broadly through social discourse and practice is Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994; see also Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. Invaluable to our education in the larger vocabulary of Islam are the extensive dictionaries of terms, concepts, and motifs used in literary expression, such as that compiled by the ill-fated Iranian scholar Sīryūs Shamsī, *Farhang-i ishārāt: asātīr, sunan, ādāb, i'tiqādāt, 'ulūm*, Tehran: Firdaws, 1377 sh [1987]. A large dictionary of Sufi concepts which both bears the impress of the ideas of its learned author and also contains extensive citations from primary sources is Javād Nūrbakhsh, *Farhang-i Nūrbakhsh: iṣṭilāḥāt-i taṣawwuf*, London: Javād Nūrbakhsh/Khāniqāh-i Ni'mat-Allāhī, 1372–1377 sh [1982–1987] (there is an English translation: Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism*, London and New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1986–2000). An excellent register of the vocabulary of Akbarian Sufism is al-Hakim, *al-Mu'jam al-Sūfi al-Ṣūfi*. The best overall introduction to Sufi vocabulary that I have read is Shāh Sayyid Muhammad Zāwqi, *Sirr-i dilbarān*, Lahore: Faysal, 2008 (2nd edition). Indispensible to understanding the conceptual vocabulary of Islamic scholarship are the later dictionaries of technical terms and concepts written for 'ulamā, such as Muḥammad A'lā 'b' Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* (edited by Muḥammad Wajih, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq and Ghulām Qādir), Calcutta: W. N. Lees' Press, 1862, and 'Abd al-Nabi b. 'Abd al-Rasūl Ahmadnagarī, *Dustūr al-'ulamā* (edited by Qutb al-Din Mahmūd b. Ghiyāth al-Din al-Haydarabādī), Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Uthmāniyyah, 1911–1913 (both are eighteenth-century works).

³ It is striking that even those conceptual efforts that seek to broaden the constitution of Islam usually fall well short of this need. For example, Ira Lapidus posits "a particular type of religion" which he terms "*Sunnī-sūfi Islam*" wherein "religious fulfillment" is enacted through values enunciated in the discourses of philosophy, theology, law, and Sufism. Somewhat puzzlingly, in light of the highly-developed and socially-prolific Sunnī-Sufi theory of the manifestation of Divine Truth in beauty, and the well-known and highly-ambiguous social practice of gazing upon beautiful faces as a means to appreciate the Divine, Lapidus insists that "eroticism is alien to sunni-sufism, as is aestheticism—absorption in the beauty of surface-appearances." Indeed, the historical evidence suggests the contrary: namely, that it is difficult to speak of Sunnī-Sufi Islam without acknowledging the presence of eroticism and aestheticism as ambiguous and ambi-valent component elements (see the classic exposition of Helmut Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, as well as the more recent work of Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and*

It should impress upon us further the importance of locating Islamic norms not merely in unilateral statements of authoritative epistemological prescription but rather, in an ongoing multilateral conversation and negotiation of the different epistemologies generated in different Truth-projects undertaken by Muslims⁴—a conversation and negotiation over norms that takes place both between Muslims in society and within individual Muslims in their own minds and beings.



To apply our conceptualization of the Islamic to a particularly vexatious question: we may now say that art is Islamic to the extent and in the manner that it is expressive of meaning in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muhammad as one or more of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text. Artistic forms are produced (whether by origination or adoption) and reproduced precisely because the society that engages with them finds them in some way possessed of value and meaning, and as capable of communicating value and meaning; the forms of art are precisely expressions, configurations, refrac-

the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ‘Arabi and ‘Iraqi, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011). Somewhat unsatisfactorily, Lapidus does not actually specify a historical society in which his type of Islam prevailed, but what is more instructive here is to note that while he relates this type of Islam to an identification with *adab*, that is “the ethical and practical norms that regulated the life of a good Muslim,” he draws, as representative sources of *adab* and the nature of “religious fulfillment” upon Miskawayhi, al-Ghazzālī, and Ibn Khaldūn—but not upon Ibn ‘Arabi and Rūmī, never mind the authors of canonical fiction such as Nizāmī, Ḥafiz, Sa‘dī, Jāmī, etc., without whom there is simply no *adab* in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, and whose writings open the door, with due ambivalence, to eroticism and aestheticism. Thus Lapidus’ important attempt to broaden the scope of “religious fulfillment in Islam” falls short precisely because he predeterminedly *curtails the range of sources of Islamic meaning*; see Ira M. Lapidus, “Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of *Adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam,” in Barbara Daly Metcalf (editor), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 38–61. In an article on “The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy,” Norman Calder also seeks to broaden the concept of Islam: “It is possible to propose that the whole intellectual tradition of Sunni Islam can be encapsulated in a list of literary genres, these being the genres, the tradition of writing, through which the Sunni community has given expression to its understanding of its relationship to God and his Prophet . . . the complete list (and I emphasize that I am referring here specifically to the Sunni community) is as follows; *qisas al-anbiya*; *sirat al-nabi*; *Qur'an*; *hadith*; *fiqh*; *kalam*; *tafsir*; and *sharh al-hadith* . . . the limits of Islamic orthodoxy are expressed in this list,” Calder, “The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy,” 74–75. Glaringly absent from Calder’s expansive gesture—and thus from the ambit of Islamic orthodoxy that is, for him, the truly Islamic—are Sufism, philosophy, and any trace of the literary discourses of *adab*. Here, too, we have a depleted conceptualization of Islam/Islamic.

⁴ On this, see further, Shahab Ahmed, *The Problem of the Satanic Verses and the Formation of Islamic Orthodoxy* (forthcoming).

tions or reifications of meanings and values. Thus, the question that we should ask when we encounter each *objet d'art* is: how is this art made valuable or meaningful in terms that arise from the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as one or more of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text? The question “what is Islamic art?” is thus really the question “What does this art object mean in terms of Islam? (and, thus, *how* does it mean)?” What difference is made to the object *qua* object by it possessing or not possessing meaning in terms of Islam? Of what consequence is Islam to the object? How and what does the object gain in meaning from its association with Islam/Islamic—and how and what do we gain from seeing it as Islam/Islamic (and how and what do we and the object lose from our non-recognition of that meaningful association)? As the Arabic grammarians say, *mā lam yufid fa-lā ma'nā la-hu*, “That which profits nothing has no meaning.”⁵

The answer to these questions will tell us what is Islamic about (Islamic) art. By conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Revelation with one or more of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, we are now able to move beyond the false problem of what to do with “secular” art objects as “opposed” to “religious” ones. A wine-cup is Islamic not despite its function, but *because* of it. It is Islamic precisely because of the (contradictory) values and meanings, negative and positive, that are made for wine in the hermeneutical engagement by Muslims with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—that is, because of the embeddedness of the object in a uniquely Islamic matrix of meaning-making. The very image of a wine-cup configures and conveys a unique constellation of values and meanings in terms of Islam that it does not have in terms of another language of meaning-making: the Mughal or Ottoman or Safavid or Mamlūk or ‘Abbāsid wine-cup means something because of its social and discursive location and standing in relation to terms of Islam that a Ming wine-cup or a Medici wine-cup does not mean because of its not being located in or standing in relation to terms of Islam.⁶ Similarly, when we con-

⁵ This well-known axiom is cited in R. M. Frank, “Meanings Are Spoken of in Many Ways: The Earlier Arab Grammarians,” *Le Muséon* 94 (1981) 259–319, at 264.

⁶ I thus disagree with Thomas Bauer when he says, in what for him is a crucial diagnostic passage, “Reference to an ‘Islamic wine goblet’ makes about as much sense as talk of ‘Christian adultery.’” To the contrary, calling the wine-cup “Islamic” tells us that this wine-cup is possessed of meaning in a particular configuration and matrix of meaning different from other configurations and matrices of meaning—the wine-cup is meaningful in terms of Islam. Bauer’s analytical shortfall here is, as throughout the presentation in his book of what he calls “a culture of ambiguity,” is his persistence in the categories of “religion” and “secular,” “wordly” and “sacred.” Thus he says, “though a large portion of the objects displayed in our museums for Islamic art come from secular [or, worldly: *weltlich*] life, no one seems to be bothered when, in an exhibition of ‘Islamic art,’ one stands in front of a pitcher with figural depictions on it, then one arrives at a display case in which a wine goblet is shown and which is presented in the catalogue under the

sider art objects that depict or represent themes such as heroism, ideal kingship, or love, we must ask the question of how each of these themes is embedded in and informed by the larger socially- and discursively-diffuse matrix of meaning-making in terms of Islam—and how these objects inform and make meaning and value in the terms of that matrix.⁷

To this end, the reader may recall from Chapter 3 that the art object that provoked Robert Irwin to conceptualize Islam in terms of Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance" is a depiction of two lovers: "Although *Humāy and Humāyūn in a garden* is unmistakably a work of Islamic art, it is extremely difficult to articulate why it is classified as such," Irwin adds, "The subject matter is not obviously religious though the poem by Khwājū al-Kirmānī that it illustrates was an allegory of the soul's quest for God disguised as a princely romance."⁸ I would say there is nothing difficult about articulating why *Humāy and Humāyūn in a Garden* (Figure 5) is a work of Islamic art: what makes this particular painting Islamic art is precisely the fact that it is a depiction of a scene in an epic narrative about love that is being presented for contemplation by a society where, as we have seen, the idea of love is possessed of a particular *meaning* and *value* (animated and informed by the socially-prolific ethos of the *madhhab-i 'ishq*).

Indeed, the painting tells us as much. In Khwājū's (1281–1361) poem, the hero, *Humāy*, falls in love with the princess *Humāyūn* (who lives many thousands of miles away in China) by gazing upon a portrait of her. He then has a dream in which he sees *Humāyūn* in a garden (the scene depicted in this

heading 'Islamic metalwork.' . . . Whole areas of secular life are terminologically sacralized through the label 'Islamic,'" Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität*, 193–194. The terminological value, though, is not in the "sacralizing" of a presumptively "secular life," but the making meaningful of life in terms of Islam.

⁷ Asking these questions in terms of Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text may serve meaningfully to re-orient, re-focus, hone, expand, and re-conceptualize Ernst Grube's attempt to bring to bear upon the question of Islamic art the formulations on iconology of Ernst Panofsky: "The *Intrinsic Meaning or Content* of an image . . . can only be completely grasped by a full understanding of the entire range of forces responsible for the formation of a specific image . . . 'The art historian will have to check what he thinks is the *intrinsic meaning* of the work or group or works . . . against what he thinks is the *intrinsic meaning* of as many other documents of civilization historically related to that work or group of works as he can master' . . . This is, in fact, the principal aim of the study of Islamic art and its iconography: to decipher the images and symbols created by the artists of the Muslim world . . . and, finally, to discover their meaning." Ernst Grube, "Iconography in Islamic Art," in Robert Hillenbrand (editor), *Image and Meaning in Islamic Art*, London: Altajir Trust, 2005, 13–33, at 13–14. Grube is drawing on Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, 26–54, at 26–40.

⁸ Irwin, "Introduction," 3.



FIGURE 5. Miniature painted in Herat *circa* 1430, depicting a scene from the poem *Humāy va Humāyūn* by Khwājū-yi Kirmānī (d. 1352), in which the lover, *Humāy*, has a dream-vision in which he sees his beloved, *Humāyūn*, in a garden (Bridgeman Images / Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris).

miniature, which was painted in Herat, at the heart of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, in about 1430), and recites to her the lines from Khwājū's poem that appear in the panel with the undecorated background, and which are, of course, an integral part and parcel of the art object in view:

Your waist is slender as a strand of hair—more slender than a strand, at that!
 I am thin, from sorrow, as a strand of hair—a twisted strand, at that!
 Like the Hindu of your ringlet I am upon the fire set alight!
 From the Sun of your countenance I am in the Fire's light!
 Of an image of your face have I looked upon a likeness:
 Did I say “image”? No; for never have I even heard of your likeness!⁹

In the first couplet Humāy (who is the figure on the right of the painting with his hands folded over his heart; Humāyūn is the crowned figure opposite, flanked on either side by a lady-in-waiting) praises, as worldly lovers tend to do, the physical body of his beloved (and then cleverly expresses the wretchedness of the lover's state by recasting upon himself in self-deprecating terms the same image used to praise the beloved). The second couplet presents the lover as burning with love from his proximity to the beloved (the image of the Hindu cremated upon the pyre is a standard trope for the black ringlet upon the bright face of the beloved). The second couplet also presents the lover illuminated by the light of the beloved as by the light of the Sun—that is, as illuminated by love; the beloved is here presented, in the basic Suhrawardian idiom, as the source of L/light. In the third couplet, Humāy starts out by telling Humāyūn that he has seen a figural representation of her (the portrait), but that having now seen the real Humāyūn (who is, actually, not the real Humāyūn, since this is, after all, a dream-vision—or, one forty-sixth of prophecy) he realizes that she is like what the Qur'ān says of God: “There is nothing like His likeness.”¹⁰ Not included in this panel is the next line of the poem, which presumably appeared on the next folio of this now dispersed manuscript:

⁹ *miyān-i tū yak mūy o az mūy kam / man az gham chū mūyi o dar mūy kham // chū hindū-yi zulf-i tū bar ātisham / zi khurshid-i rūy-i tū dar ātisham // zi naqshi-i rukhat nuskahā dīdah'm / chih naqshi kih misl-i tū nashnidah'm*, Abū-l-‘Atā Kamāl-ud-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ‘Alī b. Maḥmūd Khwājū-yi Kirmānī, *Humāy va Humāyūn* (edited by Kamāl ‘Aynī), Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1348 sh [1969], 70. I have attempted to effect a poetic translation without doing violence to the meaning. A more literal translation is: “Your waist is like a single hair—and even less than a hair / I, from sorrow, am like a hair—and in the hair there is a crook // Like the Hindu of your ringlet I am on fire / From the sun of your face I am in light // Of a portrait of your face I have seen a copy / What portrait? For, I have not heard of your likeness.”

¹⁰ *laysa ka-mithli-hi shay'*; Qur'ān 42:11 al-Shūrā.

I am so in contemplation of the image of your face
that figure-worship shall become my profession!¹¹

Humāy is, in other words, in that state of figural/metaphorical love (*'ishq-i majāzī*) that is the bridge to real-true love (*'ishq-i haqīqī*): he has passed from contemplation of the figural representation external to himself (the physical portrait of Humāyūn) on to the contemplation of the figural representation produced in his dream-vision by his own (prophetic) imagination, but has yet to attain the R/real Humāyūn of whose true likeness there is no image—that is, no adequately expressive figure. But by the end of the epic poem, in which he journeys to China, fights battles, escapes snares and ruses, and overcomes various assorted obstacles, Humāy eventually succeeds in uniting in marriage to (the real) Humāyūn—that is to say, he crosses the bridge to attain unification with the R/real object of his love. He thus succeeds in following the helpful advice that he was given earlier in the poem by a fairy who instructed him, as he contemplated Humāyūn's portrait, as to what he/we should do when we look at a painting:

Pass from the Figure, and go to the Meaning!
Make yourself Majnūn, and reach Laylā!¹²

The original audience of this painting—who are also the audience of the poem—presumably understood very well the import of the fairy's advice on art-appreciation and were able to follow it (if they did not understand what the fairy was on about, then the artist would have been wasting his time and labour in producing this image for an audience incapable of appreciating its meaning and value). Understanding very well the language of this figure—of this figural language—the audience of the painting were able to pass from the figure and go on to its meaning in terms of Islam. The Islamic meaning is articulated by the painting's explorative hermeneutical engagement with the full matrix of Revelation: with Pre-Text (expressed in the relationship between the figure/*majāz*/Seen and the meaning/real-truth/*haqīqat*/Unseen

¹¹ *man az naqsh-i rūy-at dar andīshah-am / kih šūrat parastī shavad pīshah-am*, Khwājū-yi Kirmānī, *Humāy va Humāyūn*, 70.

¹² *zi šūrat ba-bur tā bi-mā'nī rasī / chu Majnūn shavī khwud bi-Laylī rasī*, Khwājū-yi Kirmānī, *Humāy va Humāyūn*, 32; cited also in J. C. Bürgel, "Humāy and Humāyūn: A Medieval Persian Romance," in Gherardo Gnoli and Antonio Panaino (editors), *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies. Part 2. Middle and New Iranian Studies*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990, 347–357, at 348. For a treatment of the miniature painting in question, see Teresa Fitzherbert, "Khwājū Kirmānī (689–753/1290–1352): An Éminence Grise of Fourteenth-Century Persian Painting," *Journal of Persian Studies* 29 (1991) 137–151, at 145.

that lies beyond the figure), with Text (the allusion to “There is nothing like His likeness”), and with Con-Text (Majnūn and Laylā—who would later be joined as elements of Con-Text by Humāy and Humāyūn). In committing itself to the process of meaning-making by hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, *Humāy and Humāyūn in a Garden* is unmistakably and meaningfully (and beautifully) *Islamic art*.

Now, it may be that unlike Humāy, we lack the wherewithal to make the arduous journey from form to meaning. In that circumstance, it may be that, for us, *Humāy and Humāyūn in a Garden* is recognizably Islamic only because of its form and features—and, indeed, the *forms* of art are Islamic inasmuch as they are the Con-Textual vocabulary in which and by which meaning is made in terms of Islam. It may be, in other words, that we, at a *surface* level, recognize the forms of the art as Islamic, even when we do not grasp the meaning that the art makes, and the meaning that is made from the art—just as we can recognize that a particular foreign language is being spoken, even if we do not understand the meaning of what is being said. The historian of architecture, Nasser Rabbat, has argued that “it is the impact—legal, spiritual, symbolic, political, functional, behavioural, and yes formal—of Islam on architecture as seen and used by the people that gives that architecture its Islamic designation.”¹³ What Rabbat’s phrase “the impact of Islam” is grasping at is much better articulated and understood as *meaning-making in terms of Islam* wherein meaning is given expression and makes its mark as a distinct, detectable, and recognizable language of Islam, including vocabulary and forms. Those who speak that language make meaning from it—they go, like Humāy, like the Balkans-to-Bengal audience of Khwājū’s poem, and of this exquisite painting—from the form to the meaning, while those who have some exposure to it, but do not speak it, can recognize and identify the language that is being spoken even if they do not understand what it *means*.¹⁴

¹³ Nasser Rabbat, “What is Islamic architecture anyway?” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012) 1–15, at 15.

¹⁴ This conceptualization can also help us to view the modern art that is uncertainly called Islamic. In an essay on contemporary calligraphy entitled “Islamic or Not,” Fereshteh Daftari writes: “In our present polarized moment, the term is loaded with political and religious subtexts, and yet it has been applied to artists who would not necessarily use it to describe their own work, who do not live permanently in Islamic areas, and who produce art for European and American art spaces in which Muslim visitors are only a fraction of the audience.” She concludes that the objects she examines “are unconcerned with the binary oppositions of present-day politics, whether cultural or global—including ‘Islamic or not,’ Fereshteh Daftari, ‘Islamic or Not,’ in Fereshteh Daftari (editor), *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006, 10–27, at 10 and 25. In giving Islam meaning only as a binary in relation to the West, Daftari’s conceptualization fails to ask the question of whether and in what ways (however consciously or unconsciously, however refined or crude, however ersatz, tokenistic, or other-

This conceptualization can help us also to think about the Islamic meaning of everyday things, those items that led Oleg Grabar to call Islamic art “An Art of the Object,” on the basis that most of its decorated artifacts of aesthetic value relate to

the functions . . . of daily life: washing, pouring, eating, reading, playing chess, sitting, writing. We could conclude that the creative energy involved in Islamic art is an entirely gratuitous addition to the setting of life, a pure pleasure of the senses, whose peculiarity is that it was extended to a far greater number of techniques and social levels than most other traditions . . . The monuments of Islamic art . . . are in fact to be seen as ethnographic documents closely tied to life.¹⁵

I would suggest that the creative energy that is invested and worked into the decoration and ornamentation of these implements of the everyday lives of Muslims is precisely expressive of the *diffusion* of Islamic meaning through society in and as Con-Text—and as such is symptomatic of a particular valorization of everyday life as meaningful. The objects of everyday life are objects to which the user stands in a relationship of quotidian *intimacy*—they are the implements of his daily use, and the ambience of her daily environment. The investment of these intimate objects with decoration, ornament, design, pattern, and script converts them from objects of pure utility into objects of beauty—it effects what J. M. Rogers has called the “refinement of the commonplace.”¹⁶ These objects are linked together not only by their common participation in the fabric of everyday life, but also by their common participation in languages of stylized beauty/decoration/ornamentation in which these objects are all embedded—and which are embedded in these objects (the mutual intelligibility of these languages of ornament—as with the spoken and written languages of the polyglot societies of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex—is strongly suggested by the trade in these objects across the societies of the Dār al-Islam). The centrality of textual inscriptions to the Islamic art of the object scarcely needs emphasizing—these inscriptions (such as the poetry of Hāfiẓ on wine vessels) serve to transport the actions to be

wise) all these objects derive and draw meaning from the field of meaning of Islam, and how they might mean something less and different without that field of meaning. It is in that mode and measure that they are Islamic (or not).

¹⁵ Oleg Grabar, “An Art of the Object,” in *Islamic Art and Beyond: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, Volume III*, Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2006, 13–29, at 15 (first published in *Artforum* 14 [1976] 36–43).

¹⁶ J. M. Rogers, *The Uses of Anachronism: On Cultural and Methodological Diversity in Islamic Art*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1994, 19.

performed with the objects to registers of meaning beyond the physical performance of the actions alone. Beyond legible script, however, we need to think further about how the inscriptions of these quotidian objects also with decoration, ornament, design, geometric and non-geometric pattern, and illegible script, have the same effect of transporting the decorated objects to registers of meaning beyond the objects themselves.¹⁷ In general, in a Con-Text informed and animated by the commonplace conceptual relationship between beauty and truth, and between form and meaning (discussed in the treatment of metaphor in Chapter 5), the beauty of these objects, both as individual artifacts and as domestic ensemble, bears testament, like the beautiful *shāhid*-Witness, to a *higher value* beyond the immediate quotidian environment. The tactile and visual engagement with an ensemble of these objects in the performance of the actions of everyday life (washing, pouring, eating, reading, playing chess, sitting, writing, etc.) invites the user, in accordance with the instruction of the fairy to Humāy, to an engagement with the (beautiful) form of the object with a view to “Pass from the Form, and go to the Meaning.” The engagement with these objects has, in other words, the effect of refining and heightening *the value and meaning* of these daily actions in the consciousness of the actor. The Islamic art of the object is thus an art of mood or affect, indeed, an *art of consciousness*: its daily use is the altering and orienting of consciousness towards an ongoing state of the meaningfulness of everyday life as hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text.¹⁸

Art objects are *Islamic* ultimately in that—and in the particular ways that—they are aesthetic *artifacts of meaning*. Not all objects present themselves equally for meaningful reading, but to seek to identify what is Islamic about an art object is necessarily, and in the first instance, to attempt to *read for*

¹⁷ A foundational essay in this direction is Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

¹⁸ Especially thought-provoking here is the theory of Johann-Christoph Bürgel that “ornament in Islamic art may be defined as a repetitive structure ruled by the two poles of ecstasy and control, and thus imprinted by, and conveying, a feeling of mightiness which is attained through submission. Ornament comes about through submission to some very strict geometrical laws, very often even reflecting cosmological structures . . . the ornament—and this applies to calligraphy as well—is usually not restricted to the surface but penetrates into the stuff itself, pervading and moulding it. In other words, form dominates matter, matter is subjugated by form . . . the effect is brought about by a perfect harmony between the two factors of ecstasy and control. The beholder is dazzled and spell-bound, intoxicated and disciplined, excited and becalmed at the same time,” Johann-Christoph Bürgel, “Mightiness, Ecstasy and Control: Some General Features of Islamic Arts,” in Robert Hillenbrand (editor), *Image and Meaning in Islamic Art*, London: Altair Trust, 2005, 61–72, at 72. The poles of control and ecstasy of which Bürgel speaks correspond nicely to the contrary meaning-making trajectories of prescription and exploration that are treated in this book.

meaning—for which task, we must, first, duly equip and educate ourselves in the field of meaning from and to which the object speaks. Unless we are able to understand the range of modes and trajectories and vocabularies by means of which Muslims have made meaning from hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation, we will not be able to understand what is Islamic about Islamic art.¹⁹

An example of a masterpiece of Islamic art that encapsulates and (quite literally) *frames* the process of meaning-making by hermeneutical engagement with the full spatiality of Revelation, as expressed in hierarchy and exteriority-interiority, with the concomitant relationship of metaphor and paradox between the sameness-difference of the Truth and Meaning *diffused* through daily life in the Seen world and the Unseen world, and as apprehended by the discursive and praxial activity of the explorative human imagination, is the famous miniature painting produced in Herat for the Safavid court around 1526 by the Iraqi master, Sultan Muhammad, to *illustrate* a *ghazal* from the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ from which the following couplet appears inscribed in a panel at the top of the painting:

The angel of mercy raised the cup of the pleasures of intimate company:
From the draught: upon the cheek of houri and fairy: a rose-hue!²⁰

The reader will observe for herself that the painting (see Figure 6)²¹ depicts a building in four unequal planes: the two lowest and largest being at “ground

¹⁹ An important recent venture “to explore Muslim attitudes toward visual images and to suggest strategies of conceptualizing the nature of perception and the ways in which visual objects and images have been and continue to be understood in various Muslim contexts” (a venture which warrants reading) is Jamal J. Elias, *Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, 3.

²⁰ *giriftah sâghar-i ‘ishrat firishtah-i râhmat / zi jur’ah bar rukh-i hûr u parî gulâb zadah*. This couplet does not appear in the edition by Khânâlîri of Hâfiẓ’s *Dîvân* to which I have referred thus far in this book, but it does appear in the other standard modern edition (Khwâjah Shams-ud-Dîn Muhammad Hâfiẓ-i Shîrâzî, *Dîvân-i Hâfiẓ* (edited by Muhammad Qazvînî and Qâsim Ghâni), Tehran: Zuvvâr, 1320 sh [1941], 292. It appears also in the recension of the *Dîvân* commentarized in Ottoman in the sixteenth century by Südi, *Sharh-i Südi bar Dîvân-i Hafiz*, 4:1832; and in the recension commentarized in sixteenth-century India by Khâtamî, *Sharh-i ‘îrfâni-yi ghazal-hâ-yi Hâfiẓ*, 4:2682, and in all the nineteenth- and twentieth-century printed Indian recensions I have seen (see, e.g., the famous Urdu translation and commentary on the *Dîvân* of Hâfiẓ by Mîr Valî-Allâh Adîb Abatâbâdî, *Lisân-ul-Ghayb ya’ni Urdû sharh-i Dîvân-i Hâfiẓ ma’â mufâşsal savânih-i ‘umri-yi Khwâjâh-i Hâfiẓ*, Lahore: Shaykh Mubarâk ‘Ali, 1916, 2:612).

²¹ This painting has received two close studies from both of which I have benefited: see James W. Morris, “Imagining Islam: Intellect and Imagination in Islamic Philosophy, Poetry and Painting,” *Religion and the Arts* 12 (2008) 294–318, especially at 309–317; and Michael Barry, “The Allegory of Drunkenness and the Theophany of the Beloved in Sixteenth-Century Illustrations of Hafiz,” in Leonard Lewisohn (editor), *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*,



FIGURE 6. Miniature painted in Herat *circa* 1520 by Sultān Muḥammad, illustrating the couplet of Hāfiẓ: “The angel of mercy raised the cup of the pleasures of intimate company / From the draught: upon the cheek of houri and fairy: a rose-hue!” (Courtesy, the Harvard Art Museums and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Carey Welch).

London: I. B. Tauris, 2010, 213–226 (with 4 plates), especially at 216–221. For a further exegesis of miniatures that illustrate the works of another canonical author of the Bengal-to-Balkans canon, Farid-ud-Din ‘Attār, see Michael Barry, “Illustrating ‘Attār: A Pictorial Meditation by Master Ḥabiballāh of Mashhad in the Tradition of Master Bihzād of Herat,” in Leonard Lewisohn (editor), *‘Attār and the Persian Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, 135–

level” and comprising a slightly sunken outer garden, and a slightly raised inner courtyard with a low separating parapet between the two, a doorway and steps between courtyard and the garden, a fenced inner garden with flowering trees, and a central wine-storehouse. The third plane is the first floor (American: second floor) of the building comprising a balcony to the side overlooking the inner garden and street, and apartments revealed to us by their windows. At the top of the building is a rooftop-terrace encircled by a richly-decorated parapet. The reader will further observe that the “ground level” of the painting depicts—in a vivid and highly *realistic* portrayal of daily life—a wine party ongoing in the courtyard and the garden (to the accompaniment of music). The attendees do their initial drinking in the inner courtyard where a white-bearded figure on the far right, clad in a robe inner-lined in illuminated gold administers the first libation. This is, in other words, clearly a *private* gathering, where right of entry is controlled by a host, or master of ceremonies. The attendees then get progressively tipsy, eventually making their way out into the garden—we can see one gentleman being helped somewhat unsteadily out of the door and down the steps whilst he can yet stand. In the garden, we can see that a number of the attendees are in various states of intoxication. Some are dancing, some are playing musical instruments, some are arm-in-arm, a couple of them have simply passed out on the grass, and one swarthy fellow, overcome by both drink and devotion, has hurled off his turban and is attempting to kiss the foot of a fair-faced companion who is dashingly attired in a crimson robe: the scene is altogether one of general commotion (co-motion) and pleasurable abandon.²² In the second plane of the canvas (strictly speaking: the folio)—which is still on the ground floor of the building, a customer is obtaining wine from the wine-store where ample quantities of the stuff are kept in bulging earthenware vats into one of which the moon-faced serving-boy has plunged deep his arm. In the third plane, on the far left of the first floor of the building (American: second floor) a figure in the balcony is, in the time-honoured manner of pre-modern dwellers in apartments on the upper storeys of residential buildings, acquiring his

164, with 12 plates. Michael Barry has made an important contribution to our way of thinking about Islamic miniature painting in his *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzâd of Herât (1465–1535)*.

²² Barry identifies the scene as a Sufi *samā'*, “the spiritual audition of the dervishes” (Barry, “The Allegory of Drunkenness,” 217) but I do not think this is the case—at least not formally or institutionally. I see the occasion as a social wine-gathering (*majlis-i sharâb*) wherein the response to the music of the attendees has assumed some of the behavioural forms that one would see in a *samā'*-proper—such as dance with arms upraised. In my view, this shows how socially-idiomatised the Sufi *samā'* was: in a sense, all *samā'*=audition has, in some measure, become *samā'*=Sufi audition.

groceries—in this instance, a ration of wine—by raising a rope from the street to which the representative of his “home-delivery service” has knotted a flask (the rope having been lowered from the balcony for this express purpose). Another delivery-man, with a large wine-flask on his back, is setting out to take his wares to some other customer in some other place—out of picture, we might say. On the same plane as the balcony, a couple appears in a window sipping wine together in a discernibly quieter ambience of mutual absorption: they overlook the activity below but are themselves serenely unaffected by it. In another window, directly above the wine-shop and entirely unnoticed and unperturbed by those outside, sits a solitary figure—a wizened, impish fellow with a curlicue beard and a wine-bottle and cup at his feet, assuming an aspect of pop-eyed contemplation of the book in his hand (this figure is usually taken to be Hāfiẓ himself). Meanwhile, above them all, at the highest plane of the painting, on the roof of the building, *unobserved and unobservable*—that is, *Unseen—by anyone*, another wine-party is taking place. Here, the drinking companions are bewinged angels, who are imbibing together in elegant postures of graceful tranquillity—their wings of flight set at rest—in indifferent contrast to the ruckus below. Here we have left the realm of material realism and have arrived, *via* the imagination, at the Ideal wine-gathering. Here has “The angel of mercy raised the cup of the pleasures of intimate company: / From the draught: upon the cheek of houri and fairy: a rose-hue.”

To state the obvious, the painting presents the denizens of both the Seen and Unseen worlds *engaged in the same activity*: wine-drinking.²³ Wine is, in other words, *diffused* through the entire *canvas of existence* depicted in the painting: one might say that the cheek of the entire page is suffused by its hue. Yet, while the activity of wine-drinking is the same throughout, its *function* and *effect* and *consequence*—that is to say, its *meaning* for those *engaged* in the activity—is different at different planes of the spatial hierarchy of the canvas. At the lowest plane, wine is manifest as a medium for social intimacy, uplifting energy and blithe contentment. On viewing this painting, our *scientific* observer from Chapter 1, the tenth-century polymath Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, might well have recalled the remarks on wine that he made in his *Welfare of Bodies and Souls*, specifically in regard to:

the happiness and animation that it provides the soul. This is something unique to it among all foods and drinks, for none of these have in them

²³ James Morris says of the “grey-bearded figure of the reclining poet” that the “illuminated ‘Book’ of the heart is all the Wine he needs” (see Morris, “Imagining Islam,” 313), but the fact that the flask and cup are at his feet—and that the flask is half-empty—would suggest that the poet has been drinking, and that when stops reading, he will likely pour himself another.

anything of which the pleasure is transported from the body to the soul producing therein—as does this drink—an abundance of happiness, animation, openness, stimulation, self-contentment, generosity, and freedom from cares and sorrows.²⁴

At the second plane of the spatial hierarchy of existence, wine is *raised up* (*via* a knotted rope) to the level of being a source for meaningful conversation, contemplation and intellection. Beholding the two figures in the window on the left, Abū Zayd might reiterate:

Further among its virtues is that it is the thing that creates a cause for friends to come together around it in conversation and close company . . . It is known that society is made pleasurable by listening or by conversing . . . and that it is by listening and conversing that companionship and happiness flourish in social gatherings—and that nothing makes listening and conversing so agreeable and pleasurable as partaking in wine. It is wine that provides excellence to society and conversation . . . and there is nothing that makes possible relations of intimacy and confidence between friends so tastefully and pleasantly and effectively as does drinking wine together. In this way one finds that . . . the person dearest to anyone from among all his associates is his boon-companion who drinks with him.²⁵

And, observing the bearded gentleman absorbed in his book with the half-consumed wine-flask at his feet, Abū Zayd might have added:

Among its virtues is that it acts to produce a marvelous effect within the capacities of the soul . . . It . . . increases that which is already present in a person: such as the capacities for understanding, memory, intellect, eloquence, and sharpness of thought; for it is known that these virtues increase in a person when he has reached the midway state of drinking—before he is overcome by inebriation.²⁶

The utter and vivid *realism* of the entire social scene beneath the heavenly plane leaves us in no doubt that, in the one *dimension*, the painting is a graphic illustration of these empirical virtues of wine-drinking. However, the painting is about more than this. The portrayal of the Unseen drinking-party

²⁴ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus*, 417.

²⁵ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus*, 418.

²⁶ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa al-anfus*, 417.

of the angels adds *another dimension* to the meaning of wine for human beings. While the wine being consumed by the humans in the painting from the bulging earthenware vats is the same stuff that you or I might acquire today in bottles at the supermarket, wine is not merely a drink of this Seen world but is also the drink of the Unseen World (it is, as the Qur'ān tells us, the drink of Paradise).²⁷ The act of wine-drinking in the Seen World is *related* and *connected* to the Other World: *in the act*, earthly wine-drinkers are entering into that relation and enacting that connection—that *meaningful co-relation*—of Seen to Unseen, of wine to Wine (one might say that the earthly wine-drinkers are enacting the immortal phrase of Matthew 6:10 “in earth, *as it is in heaven*”).²⁸ Wine is a shared medium that links the existences of the Seen and Unseen worlds: to drink wine is to know and experience something of and like the Unseen even as we cannot see the Unseen. The earthly wine-drinkers are entering into a dynamic of upward motion—expressed in the painting in the raised hands of the dancers, the tall and slender trees that blossom as they rise, the two floors of the building with their differently engaged denizens, and, of course, the raising of the wine on the knotted rope (the wine in the painting both goes up itself and takes you up with it).²⁹ The lower, real, material, everyday wine of the Seen world is, in other words,

²⁷ For the “rivers of wine” [*anhārun min khamrin*] of Paradise, see Qur’ān 47:15 Muhammad.

²⁸ *Holy Bible, Containing the Old Testament, and the New: Newly Translated out of the Original Tongues: and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesties speciall Commandment*, London: Robert Barker, 1611.

²⁹ Barry’s emphasis in his study of the painting is on the *downward movement* of the emanation of divine light as expressed in the metaphor of wine (see Barry, “The Allegory of Drunkenness,” 220–221), while Morris points both to “‘raising’ all the outwardly mundane experiences and attachments of this world to their real, transmuted state as divine ‘Signs’ and presences, and at the same time ‘lowering’ the transmuted Wine of the their essential spiritual guidance, love, inspiration and wisdom back into the wider human community throughout history” (Morris, “Imaging Islam,” 312). In my view, Sultān Muhammad’s emphasis in this painting is on the *upward* movement of transformation of consciousness through the metaphor of wine. Certainly, this upward movement is logically contingent on the presumption of the downward movement of ideal into material of which the upward movement is the return journey of self-transformation but, in my assessment, it is not the downward emanation that is being illustrated here. Central to both Barry’s and Morris’s argument for downward movement is the flask and rope at the left of the image. Barry says that the flask is being *lowered*, symbolizing the descent of “Wine, one of Sufism’s favoured . . . metaphors for divine light . . . from its celestial heights, where it is first only quaffed by angels (their cheeks flushed by its warmth), down into this world’s receiving vessels” (Barry, “The Allegory of Drunkenness,” 218); while Morris is of the view that “The painter leaves it carefully indeterminate whether that transmuted Wine depicted being raised by the long turban-band at the left . . . is being raised or lowered” (Morris, “Imaging Islam,” 312). I think there is no doubt whatever from the posture of the figure at the bottom of the rope (the delivery-boy) that the wine is being *raised* and not lowered: the boy is cupping the wine-flask with *one hand* while his gaze is directed straight upwards at the man on the balcony—this is precisely *not* the posture that someone *receiving a lowered* wine-flask would assume; that person

transporting and transforming the drinkers upwards towards (*altered*) consciousness, knowledge and experience of the higher, Real, ideal, eternal Wine of the Unseen world. As one's gaze moves up from the bottom of the painting, one goes from the realm of the material, to that of the intellectual, to that of ideal. *Wine is a means to meaning that is diffused throughout the canvas of the cosmos:* the same act of meaning-making is taking place on earth and in heaven and in-between.

The wine from the vats is at once a consciousness-altering physical thing, and a consciousness-altering metaphor: the painting expresses perfectly the axiom *al-majāz qanṭarat al-haqīqah*, “Metaphor is the bridge of Real-Truth.” It is not clear whether the wine being drunk from the vats is the *same* as the Wine being drunk in the Unseen world—that it might be the same is something that is subtly suggested in the fact that the wine-jug of the angels is of similar design and decoration to that being hoisted from the street by the rope—or whether it is *not* the same as the wine of the Unseen world—something that is suggested by the fact that the roof-top is physically *cut off from* the spaces below, with no shared apertures between the two, indicating that the angels are perhaps not being supplied by the same vintner as are all those below (perhaps the angels have a superior vintage of rarer provenance: a *better, older—presumably, eternal—vintage in the same bottle*). The point I should like to emphasize here is precisely the ambiguity and mutual-embeddedness of the two sides of reality/Reality; that is, the mutually-constitutive experiential ambiguity of the ‘ālam al-majāz and the ‘ālam al-haqīqah whereby the experiences and meanings of the one are transfigured and transformed and made meaningful by the experiences of the other. The painting is also, of course, about *attraction* and *love*—both real and metaphorical—as evident in the passionate abandon of the foot-kisser and the mutual rapture of the drinking couple. It is also about the *meaningfulness* of interiority/exteriority. The gathering, as we have noted, is a *private* one, but is a social gathering, nonetheless—it is a private-public space of meaning (as, for that matter, is the enclosed gathering of the angels). The private-public nature of the space of meaning is expressed precisely in the word that Hāfiẓ uses to denote the nature of the sociability at stake: *ishrat*. *Ishrat* conveys the fundamental ideas of “intimate society” and “pleasure”: that is, a pleasure made *possible* and *meaningful* by the fact of intimate company. When Hāfiẓ says, “The angel of mercy took up the sāghar-i *ishrat*,” he is saying precisely that what is taken up is the *pleasures of consuming wine in intimate company*.

would be looking straight ahead at the flask, and would be clutching it with *both* hands, so as to avoid the mishap of its falling to the ground.

This marvelous miniature—Şâdiqî Bêg Afshâr might have called it a “portrait of meaning”—by Sultân Muhammâd does exactly what, as we saw in Chapter 1, the preface to the album of the Ottoman Sultan Ahmet I says that a painting should do: it presents a “chameleonic” gallery of forms “for the acquisition of the capital of the science of philosophical-wisdom, and as means for perfecting the refinement of the moral-detecting and -drawing eye.” It serves, moreover, certainly and assuredly (as the introduction to the album of the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I said a painting should) “to quicken the profound thinking and to edify the illuminating conscience and enlightened heart of the auspicious person of the Emperor of the zenith of ascending degrees”³⁰—or indeed, of anyone aspiring to the zenith of ascending degrees! And this is the point: as was the case of *Humây and Humâyun in a Garden*, Sultân Muhammâd’s audience, like the painter himself, understood the various levels and mechanisms by which the painting operated: there was precious little purpose in the painter going to the enormous pains of producing such a work for an audience clueless as how to “detect” and “draw” the “moral”—that is, the *meaning*—of this painting. The obvious paradox lies, of course, in the fact that a *figural painting* about *wine*—that is, the expression of two practices proscribed by the law—serves here to instruct Muslims as a means to the meaning of the Truth. Both painting and wine-drinking are made meaningful here in terms of Islam—and Islam is made meaningful in terms of painting and wine-drinking. The painting is itself a perfectly paradoxical answer to the question *What is Islam?*³¹



Sultân Muhammâd’s *Worldly and Otherworldly Drunkenness* contains another activity that is not ordinarily regarded as something that may be qualified by

³⁰ See the translation of the introduction to the album of Sultan Ahmed I in Chapter 1.

³¹ It seems almost superfluous to say at this stage that I regard as wrong the insistence of Oliver Leaman in a book on *Islamic Aesthetics* that “the sorts of work that are generally characterized as Islamic art are perfectly accessible aesthetically without any especial understanding of the cultural context within which those objects were produced. This is not to say that such a contextualization would be vacuous, for it would help to orient the viewer or listener to what was before him, and this is surely very helpful. Yet the issue is how essential this would be for *aesthetic* understanding, and the answer . . . is that it is not essential,” Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics*, 186. If beauty is *meaningful*, then to *understand* what is beautiful and artistic in an object—that is, to access the object aesthetically—is inextricably tied up with its meaning in the society which produced it, beheld it, valued it, and understood it to be beautiful and artistic. If the reader feels that my exegesis of the art objects treated in this book has not added to his/her aesthetic understanding of these objects then Leaman may be right. If some gain in understanding has been accomplished, then Leaman is wrong.

the word *Islamic*: namely, music. It is interesting to note that, unlike the debate over the pairing of the word “*Islamic*” in “*Islamic art*” or “*Islamic philosophy*,” the term “*Islamic music*” is almost never used—and if it is, then only for devotional (i.e., “religious”) music³²—all non-devotional music being *per definitionem* non-religious and *thus* non-*Islamic*. Yet, in the *self-statement* of Muslims, we find that music is made *meaningful* precisely in terms of the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—that is, in *Islamic* terms.

Thus, the great Amīr Khusraw (he of the crooked hat), who is *the* foundational figure in the musical tradition of South Asian Muslims—he is popularly regarded as the inventor of the two fundamental musical instruments of North India, the *tablā* and the *sītār*, of definitive musical genres, such as *khayāl*, *qawwālī* and *tarānah*, and of new and seminal *rāgahs*³³—says in a Persian couplet in his (Persian-language) epistle *On the Ramification of the Roots and Branches of Music*:

The musician is a Form of Meaning –
if he is not marred by the black mole of vulgarity;
When you remove that dot from his face,
the musician becomes True Meaning.³⁴

Amīr Khusraw is here indulging in a nice bit of word-play: the orthographic difference between the (Arabic/Persian/Urdu/Ottoman) word for musician, *mughannī*, and the word for meaning, *ma‘nā/ma‘nī*, is a single black dot. The master-musician is saying precisely that music (when it is refined and elevated beyond the trappings of vulgar enticement) is *Truly Meaning-ful* (the resonance with Șādiqī Bēğ Afshār’s characterization of figural painting in terms of the relation between Form and Meaning—cited in Chapter 1—will be apparent to the reader). Indeed Khusraw elsewhere describes the members of

³² “*Islamic music* is Muslim religious music as sung or played in public services or private devotions,” “*Islamic Music*,” *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_music (viewed on 28 June, 2013).

³³ On the musical image of Amīr Khusraw, see Yousuf Saeed, “The Debate on Amir Khusrau’s ‘Inventions’ in Hindustani Music,” *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society* 39 (2008) 220–231.

³⁴ *mughannī šūrat-i ma‘nī-st khāl-i khissat ar nabvad / chu raft ān khāl az rūy-ash mughannī rāst ma‘nī shud*; Amīr Khusraw, *Dar inshī‘āb-i üşül o furū‘-i mawsiqī*, in Amīr Khusraw, *I‘jāz-i Khusravī*, Lucknow: Naval Kishōr, 1876, 2:275–291, at 2:282. I came across this *risālah* by way of the valuable translation of and study on it by Shahab Sarmadee (who died before completing the final version of his manuscript), but my own translation of the text is often quite different from his; see Shahab Sarmadee, *Amir Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music in Rasa’ il’ul I‘jāz better known as I‘jāz-i Khusrawī (Risāla II, Khatṭ 9, harfīii)*(edited by Prem Lata Sharma and Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye), Kolkatta: ITC Sangeet Research Academy, 2004, 11.

his musical *majlis*, which he describes as “our private *majlis*”³⁵—the star of which was a woman: a *diva* called Turmatī Khātūn of whom Khusraw says that she “gives life to the lovers through the constitution of desires”³⁶—as “those who *know the sciences of meanings*.³⁷ The *meaning of music* for both performers and audience is conveyed by Amīr Khusraw in the following three Arabic couplets in the same epistle:

Blessings upon he who, in a single moment, can move another
To weeping, to laughter, to wakefulness, to slumber!³⁸

God’s leave upon those persons who, when they sing:
By their song is raised up the gathered multitude—
and *you will behold the people drunk!*³⁹

The strings of your ‘ūd: O! sage-doctor of the lute—
Are in dear-ness to the lovers as is the jugular vein!⁴⁰

The first couplet contains the fundamental concept of the *experience* of music in the history of societies of Muslims: the particular idea of *tarab* or “rapture”—which is the experience of being *moved*, whether by joy or sorrow, from one state of emotion, sensation, or consciousness to another—the musician is a *muṭrib*, one who effects such a movement in others.⁴¹ Thus does Khusraw call for “Blessings upon he who, in a single moment, can move another to weeping, to laughter, to wakefulness, to slumber”—for such a person

³⁵ *majālis-i nihānī-i mā*; Amīr Khusraw, *Ijāz-i Khusravī*, 2:281 (compare Sarmadee, *Amīr Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music*, 10).

³⁶ *muhyī‘at-ul-‘ushshāq bi-ā‘in-il-ashwāq*, Amīr Khusraw, *Ijāz-i Khusravī*, 2:277 (compare Sarmadee, *Amīr Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music*, 6).

³⁷ *ma‘ārif-i ma‘āni shināsi*, Amīr Khusraw, *Ijāz-i Khusravī*, 2:277 (compare Sarmadee, *Amīr Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music*, 5). For the exploration by Muslims of the idea that music is something that is meaningful and requires understanding, see the exposition of the theories on music of the Islamic philosophers in Fadlou Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music in Medieval Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995 (in particular the chapter on al-Ḥasan al-Kātib at 81–91).

³⁸ *ṭubā li-lladhī ṭarraba zamānān wāḥidan / yubkī wa yudahhikū yunādī wa yunawwim*; Amīr Khusraw, *Ijāz-i Khusravī*, 2:277 (compare Sarmadee, *Amīr Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music*, 5).

³⁹ *jāwaza Allāhu ‘an aqwāmin idhā kāna tagħannat / qāma ḥashrun bi-ghinā-him wa tarā al-nāsa sukārā*; Amīr Khusraw, *Ijāz-i Khusravī*, 2:281 (compare Sarmadee, *Amīr Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music*, 10).

⁴⁰ *awṭāru ‘ūdi-ka yā ḥakim al-mizhari / ‘izzu-hu li-l-‘ushshāqi mithl ul-abhuri*; Amīr Khusraw, *Ijāz-i Khusravī*, 2:283 (compare Sarmadee, *Amīr Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music*, 14).

⁴¹ On *tarab*, see A. J. Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, especially at 191–225. See also the invocation of *tarab* in the description of *ṣamā‘* by al-Dawwānī, cited in Chapter 4.

is precisely the true musician whose music has the effect and consequence of *transporting* (*tarraba/aṭraba*) the listener to another state of being.

The second couplet is precisely about that experience of transportation—and conveys that experience by means of a quite breathtaking Qur’ānic allusion. The phrase in italics in the second hemistich of the couplet, *and you will behold the people drunk*, is a direct quotation from the Qur’ān, *wa tarā al-nāsa sukārā*, in a verse that describes the scene on the Day of Judgement—“And you will behold the people drunk, but they will not be drunk.”⁴² The Day of Judgement is also called by the Qur’ān “the Day of Gathering” (*yawm al-ḥashr*, invoked directly in the couplet by the word *hashr*), and the “Day of Rising” (*yawn al-qiyāmah*; that is the Rising of the dead) invoked directly in the couplet by the word *qāma* (the verb of which *qiyāmah* is the gerund). Here Amīr Khusraw likens the scene at his private music *majlis*, where the “knowers of the sciences of meanings” are brought to their feet by Turmatī Khātūn and transported to a (un-)consciousness beyond their sober witnessing of the realities of the world, to the scene at the Day of Resurrection when the bodies of men are held in helpless compulsion and the Real-Truth of Being is laid irresistibly open. The co-relation between this-worldly experience and other-worldly experience is superbly effected precisely by the deployment of the Qur’ānic phrase: both in God’s Gathering and in the gathering of music people *appear* in the same state of drunken being—both God and the God-blessed master-musician possess that transporting power. That there is play and irony in Khusraw’s verse there is no doubt; but there is also profound ambiguity and, by means of that ambiguity, profound *meaning*. The transporting music of the *majlis* of Khusraw is *experienced* and *made meaningful* in unmistakably and *uniquely Islamic* terms.

The third couplet contains another Qur’ānic allusion which is, perhaps, even more startling. Here Amīr Khusraw presents the image of the lovers—that is, the Muslim pursuants of the *madhhab-i ‘ishq*—experiencing the throbbing with music of the strings of the ‘ūd as intimately as the throbbing within the body of the life’s-blood of the jugular vein. Now, probably the single Qur’ānic verse by the recitation of which a Muslim feels the presence of the Divine most intimately is that in which God says, “Truly, it is We who have created man, and We know what his innermost self whispers within him—for We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”⁴³ No Muslim with even the most rudimentary knowledge of the Qur’ān can hear this couplet of Khusraw’s

⁴² *wa tarā al-nāsa sukārā wa mā hum bi-sukārā*; Qur’ān 22:2 al-Hajj.

⁴³ *wa la-qad khalaqnā al-insāna wa na’lamu mā tuwaswisi bi-hi nafsu-hu wa nahnu aqrabu ilay-hi min ḥabl al-warid*, Qur’ān 50:16 Qāf. The couplet uses a different word for jugular vein: *al-abhr*.

without hearing the echo within his innermost self of this Qur’ānic verse. In this couplet, the Muslim’s experience of music and the Muslim’s experience of God are collapsed into the same vital and meaningful sensation—a pulsing sensation without which there is no life, and no self. Again, the *experience* and *meaning* of music for a Muslim is valorized and expressed in unmistakably and *uniquely Islamic* terms.

Amīr Khusraw is complimenting musically the theory of audition (*samā'*) expressed by his master and beloved, Nizām-ud-Din Awliyā:

Shaykh Badr-ud-Dīn Ghaznavī asked the Shaykh of the Shaykhs of the world [i.e., Nizām-ud-Din Awliyā] (May God purify the great secret of them both): “From where does the un-consciousness [*bihūshī*] of the people of audition [*ahl-i samā'*] come?”

His Presence, the Shaykh of the Shaykhs of the World, answered, “They hear the call of *Am I not your Lord?* [*a lastu bi-rabbi-kum*] and fall un-conscious. From that day on, un-consciousness is deposited within them such that when they hear *samā'*, that unconsciousness takes effect within them, and perplexity and movement [*hayrat va harakat*] become apparent in them.”⁴⁴

The sound that the “people of audition” hear is the Divine utterance “Am I not your Lord?” which is the first thing said by God to the human race: “And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants, and had them bear witness upon themselves: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we bear witness!’ Lest you say on the Day of the Rising, ‘We were not aware of this’!”⁴⁵ Musical audition is thus transportation to unconscious audition of the sound and Truth of Divine Speech.

All this is crowned by Khusraw in the following Arabic invocation:

We praise the *Guide* to the paths of good; He is the *All-Hearing*; He corrects every (dis-)harmony; He is the *All-Wise*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See Muhammad b. Mubārak Kirmānī Amīr Khwurd (d. 1312), *Siyar-ul-awliyā*, Delhi: Maṭba’ah Muḥibb-ul-Hind, 1885, 509–510 (cited by Aditya Behl, *Love’s Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 322; compare the translation).

⁴⁵ *wa idh akhadha rabbu-ka min bani ādama min zuhūri-him dhurriyyata-hum wa ashhadahum ‘alā anfusi-him a lastu bi-rabbi-kum qālū balā shahidnā an taqūlū yawm al-qiyāmati in-nā kunnā ‘an hādhā ghāfilīn*, Qur’ān 7:122 al-A’rāf.

⁴⁶ *nahmad al-hādi ilā tūruq al-khayr huwa al-samī’ huwa muṣlih li-al-lāhn huwa al-hakīm*, Khusraw, *Ijāz-i Khusravī*, 2:283 (compare Sarmadee, *Amīr Khusraw’s Prose Writings on Music*, 14). The word *lāhn* means both “tune” and “solipsism”; hence my rendering as “(dis-)harmony.”

The *Guide* to the paths of good is, of course, God, “The Guide” (*al-Hādī*) being one of his Ninety-Nine Names in the Qur’ān, as is *al-Samī'*, the All-Hearing. God, then, is the ultimate audience of the music of Khusraw’s *majlis*. God is also the ultimate conductor of the music of the *majlis* who “corrects” all errors of harmony. He is also the All-Wise, *al-Hakīm*, who knows the *hikmah*, or universal wisdom contained in and expressed by music.

Amīr Khusraw, of course, wrote in a society in which Muslims disagreed vigorously with each other over the legitimacy of music as an activity for Muslims—that is to say, they disagreed over the meaning of music in relation to the question *What is Islam?*⁴⁷ This disagreement continues down to the present day with the dominant legal position, founded in the main on a corpus of proscriptive Hadith, being that only such music is permissible as is for devotional purposes—and then, too, only with a limited range of instruments with the prohibition of the projection of the female voice in front of men, and other sundry restrictions.⁴⁸ It is this preponderantly prohibitory stance of the juridical discourse that led the musicologist, Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, to speak of the “paradox [that] arises from the discrepancy between theory—the unfavourable attitude of Islam towards music—and practice—the existence of music as an almost indispensable part of Islamic social life”⁴⁹—a contradictory circumstance which she characterized as “the complementary opposition of music and religion.”⁵⁰ For Amīr Khusraw, however, music and Islam are *not* opposed: in his view, music engages directly with the Truth of the Pre-Text and transports the self to the experience and knowledge of the Truth of the Pre-Text—while the Text serves Khusraw with a language in which to speak about the meaning of music in recognizable terms of Islam. Khusraw’s hermeneutical engagement is not carried out in the established register of any one of the scholastic sciences: it is neither pure philosophy, nor pure Sufism, nor is it theology or law, nor does his engagement take place in the context

⁴⁷ This debate is still going. See, e.g., Farhana Mayer (editor), *Proceedings of the Conference on Islam and Music: “Much Ado About Music,”* London: Education Society of the Association of Muslim Researchers, 1993.

⁴⁸ Hadiths against music are cited by its ninth-century opponent, Ibn Abi Dunyā; see James Robson, *Tracts on Listening to Music, being Dhamm al-malāḥī by Ibn abī'l-Dunyā and Bawāriq al-ilmā'* by Majd al-Dīn al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938. For a contemporary work which presents “Islam’s Stance on Music,” and with which Amīr Khusraw would have disagreed, see Khalid Baig, *Slippery Stone: An Inquiry into Islam’s Stance on Music*, Garden Grove: Openmind Press, 2011.

⁴⁹ Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, *Music in the Mind: The Concepts of Music and Musician in Afghanistan*, Kent: Kent State University Press, 1983, 35.

⁵⁰ Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, “The Complementary Opposition of Music and Religion in Afghanistan,” *World of Music* 28.3 (1986) 33–41.

of the genre of exegesis of the Qur’ān (*tafsīr*). Khusraw’s is at once a synthetic and organic hermeneutical engagement in which all these various elements—his couplets on music constitute and make normative statements that are at once philosophy, Sufism, theology, Qur’ānic exegesis and law—are blended and amalgamated to *explore and generate meaning for the self in music in terms of Islam*.

Khusraw’s meaning—that is, Khusraw’s *Islam*—expressed both in-and-as his music and in what he says about music, subsequently entered into and became a part of the Con-Text of meanings of Islam available for transmission and reception and utilization by future generations of Muslims, and for the hermeneutical engagement of those future societies of Muslims as they make meaning for themselves in terms of music and of Islam. When we conceive of music in terms of Islam, we should not, therefore, speak in terms of the complimentary opposition of “religion” and “social life”: the opposition and contradiction about music is between Muslims and other Muslims—and is within Islam. The contradiction, the complimentary opposition, the paradox, *is Islam*.



This is a useful juncture at which briefly to turn to an important question that has suggested itself both in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 5, but that I have not yet treated directly; namely, the consequence of our re-conceptualization of Islam for thinking and speaking about the relationship between Islam and what we today call “science,” meaning natural science, or the study of nature. “Science” is, of course, in the epistemological condition of the modern, categorically distinguished from “religion” as truth produced by “reason” rather than by “faith.” In other words, science, like the secular, is one of the binaries that defines “religion”: modern natural science is, *per definitionem*, secular.⁵¹ Historians of science tend reflexively to use this binary language, distinguishing between “religious knowledge” and “scientific knowledge” where, in the case of Islam, “religious knowledge” is constituted by Qur’ān and Hadith (scripture), theology and metaphysics, whereas “scientific knowledge” is represented by “the rational sciences” and “the exact sciences,” or by the straight-

⁵¹ An excellent recent monograph that grapples with the conceptual problems attendant on the application of the terms “science” and “religion” to the study of the “intertwined legacy of the physiology, philosophy and theology in pre-modern Islamic societies” is Nahyan Fancy, *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt: Ibn al-Nafis, Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection*, New York: Routledge, 2013, 95.

forward distinguishing of the respective domains of “science and religion, the rational and the sacred.”⁵²

I have proposed an epistemological agenda where one puts aside the concept “religion” when conceptualizing Islam/Islamic precisely because it forces us into the religion-secular binary that (as we have seen in Chapter 3) in numerous ways defeats the conceptual purpose. I have also (in Chapter 5) indicated how, in historical societies of Muslims, the philosophers’ project of knowing by pure reason was understood by its practitioners as the act of discovering the Divine Truth of the Rational Pre-Text of Revelation: the philosophers’ is declaredly, entirely, and coherently an *Islamic* truth. This rational relationship with the truth of the Pre-Text applies fully to the Muslim natural scientist as well. The reader will recall from the previous chapter how “the parallel (or even the identity) between the revelation of the Qur’ān and the revelation of the universe has been pointed out by several medieval Muslim authors who have noted the numerous passages in which the revelation of the Qur’ān and the creation of nature are coupled.”⁵³ The sphere of operations of the natural scientist is precisely the revelation of the universe which comprises the horizons of the Signs of God’s creation spoken of in the Qur’ān: “We will show them our Signs on the horizons and in themselves—until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth.”⁵⁴ The Muslim natural scientist seeks, through Reason, to adduce Divine Truth directly from its enactment and emplotment in the phenomena of the cosmos beyond the Text. By harnessing and applying human reason (*‘aql*), natural scientists detect the workings of Divine Reason—which the twelfth-century rationalist Ḥāmid al-Balkhi called “the Organizing Intellect [*‘aql-i mudabbir*] by the execution of which the constellations are raised up and the earth set in place.”⁵⁵ Human reason is the means by which natural scientists access the Divine Truth of the Unseen as it lies behind and is enacted in the Seen of Nature. R/reason is the method and epistemology that serves, in the language of al-Balkhi’s highly scientific and empirical metaphors, as “the *gauge* of truth, the *scale* of justice, and the *astrolabe* of certainty and knowledge”⁵⁶ for ascertaining the truth of God’s cosmos. It is for this reason that it is conceptually obstructive to use the terms

⁵² E.g., Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, 19, and 111.

⁵³ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān*, 71.

⁵⁴ *sa-nuri-him āyāti-nā fi al-āfāqi wa fī anfusi-him hattā yatabayyana la-hum anna-hu al-haqqu*; Qur’ān 41:53 Fuṣṣilat.

⁵⁵ Pūrjāvādī, *Zabān-i ḥāl*, 635.

⁵⁶ Pūrjāvādī, *Zabān-i ḥāl*, 635.

“science” and “religion” in *categorical distinction* when talking about the projects of natural science undertaken in historical societies of Muslims. The distinction in terms of Islam is between projects that seek to access the Divine Truth of the Pre-Text of Revelation from sources beyond the Text, and projects that seek to access the Divine Truth of the Pre-Text of Revelation from the Text. Natural science is, like philosophy, a rational project of knowing the rational Pre-Text of Revelation.

In light of my putting aside the concept of “religion” in conceptualizing Islam, it should not be necessary for me to repeat that I am not saying that “everything is religion.” In my conceptualization, Islamic science—or what is Islamic about science—is not constituted by the venture of modern Muslims to discover in the verses of the Qur’ān and the Hadith of the Prophet scientific knowledge about the natural world.⁵⁷ It is rather the long historic venture by Muslims to harness and apply reason to the study of natural phenomena in an attempt to discover universal truths that are, by virtue and fact of their being universal and discovered by reason, genuine truths of God’s cosmos. Thus, the historian of science Robert Morrison writes of the astronomer and Qur’ān commentator Nīzām al-Dīn al-Nīzābūrī (d. 1328):

The order of the heavens for Nīzābūrī was a clear sign of a wise creator, and knowledge of this creator helped the soul ascend gradually from the material to the abstract . . . The Qur’ān led Nīzābūrī to observational astronomy and . . . astronomy . . . led Nīzābūrī to theological reflection on how God controls the universe that he (Nīzābūrī) is observing.

Nīzābūrī’s successes did not depend on a bifurcation between his religious and scientific work. Science was a part of Nīzābūrī’s religious scholarship, and religious scholarship shaped his science. Moreover, the patterns of reasoning in his religious and scientific ruminations were often similar . . . he saw God’s involvement in natural processes and he used concepts borrowed from Islamic law to understand how God controlled nature . . . he asserted the findings of theoretical astronomy in *Gharā’ib al-Qur’ān* [Nīzābūrī’s commentary on the Qur’ān] to rebut al-Rāzī’s skeptical presentation of scientific material in *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* [al-Rāzī’s commentary on the Qur’ān].⁵⁸

⁵⁷ For a brief historical overview and critique of this tendency, see Dallal, *Islam, Science and the Challenge of History*, 169–176.

⁵⁸ Robert G. Morrison, *Islam and Science: The Intellectual Career of Nīzām al-Dīn al-Nīzābūrī*, London: Routledge, 2007, 29, 42, and 146.

What emerges from this description fits seamlessly the epistemological condition where “the parallel (or even the identity) between the revelation of the Qur’ān and the revelation of the universe” are being accessed by one and the same Muslim scientist, and are put by him into one and the same conversation about the one and the same commodity—Divine Truth. Indeed, the language of “religious” and “scientific” here gets in the way of understanding what Niżām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī is doing: he is not doing “science” and “religion,” but rather he is seeking knowledge of Divine Truth as found in Pre-Text and Text of Revelation. In seeking to conceptualize the relationship of natural science to Islam, we should thus frame the question not in terms of the relationship between “religion” and “science,” but in terms of the disagreement among Muslims over the validity of pure reason as a means to access Truth of the Pre-Text of Revelation—and thus of the validity of those Pre-Textual truths relative to Textual truths. When Muslim natural scientists exerted themselves towards uncovering the workings of the cosmos, they were precisely asserting the capacity of humans to know Divine Truth by reason. When those that disagreed with them qualified or rejected the validity of the knowledge they obtained, they were qualifying or rejecting that claim to Pre-Textual truth.

Ahmad Dallal has argued for the emergence between the eleventh and fifteenth century of an epistemological approach that excluded “final-cause explorations from science”—meaning that this approach ruled that natural science had nothing definitive or authoritative to tell us about God. The effect of this, according to Dallal, was “to divest scientific knowledge of religious meaning (notwithstanding the marvels of God’s creation) . . . Now science could boldly claim authority based on secular reason . . . With this ideal of neutrality, it was possible to pursue the sciences for their intellectual merits independent of any connection to religion.”⁵⁹ I am not so sure that this separation of realms was, in human terms, so easy to effect. Even if the truth claims of natural science were asked to stop short of God, this did not mean that natural science ceased outright to be an ongoing hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text of Revelation. As long as the cosmos was conceived of not so much as the “marvels” but as the “truths” of God’s creation, and as long as Muslims continued to entertain the notion that these truths were accessible outside of Text, then knowledge derived from the project of natural science could not cease to be conceived of as knowledge that revealed the Truth of God.

⁵⁹ Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, 146–147.

The claim of natural science to knowledge of the truth of the working of the world validates itself by means of the constructive, interactive, curative and salvific *power* of that truth. When that constructive, interactive, curative and salvific power is successfully deployed in society for human well-being and felicity, the *consonance* of natural science with the Divine Truth is thereby *demonstrated* in the most visually and experientially convincing and powerful way. Thus, while it may be that, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr has observed, “the natural sciences cultivated by the Muslims in general . . . are so many expressions of the unicity of Nature, of the dependence of all things upon each other and upon their Divine Source,”⁶⁰ it is the *meaningful consequence* of the truth of natural science that demonstrates to people its relation to the Truth and Power of the Divine Source—the Truth and Power of the Pre-Text.

The prolific social scale on which the projects of natural science continued to be undertaken (evidenced, if nothing else, by the prodigious number of surviving manuscripts pertaining to the natural sciences) rendered the practices and motifs of the natural sciences an ever-present element in the consciousness and language of societies of Muslims. The vocabulary of the natural sciences became, as Sonja Brentjes tells us, part and parcel of the idiom of Muslims’ meaning-making:

Fine arts, literature, especially poetry, became an important partner of the sciences. Scientific terms and themes were appropriated for literary purposes, while writers on scientific topics increasingly welcomed poetic forms . . . Numerous Arabic and Persian poems present themselves as debates between protagonists whose ideas draw directly on the sciences—astronomy, astrology, medicine—and philosophy.⁶¹

In short, the natural sciences should be seen in the history of societies of Muslims as a project of hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text of Revelation whose logic and Truth-product was consonant and resonant with other rational and Pre-Textual projects, and whose vocabulary was available in Con-Text as a part and parcel of the means of meaning-making by Muslims in terms of Islam—even as “gauge of truth, scale of justice, and astrolabe of certainty.” Indeed, we shall shortly see the ubiquity of this idiom in evidence, both in the self-identification of Muslims with heroic figures of the universal project of natural science, and in the routine identification in the political theory of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex of the ideal Muslim ruler—God’s

⁶⁰ Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 280.

⁶¹ Brentjes, “The Interplay of Science, Art and Literature,” 454.

Vicegerent, the upholder of Divine order on earth—with that most indispensable of curative natural scientists, the medical physician.



Conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation—that is, as meaning-making for the self in terms of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text diffused through a broad spectrum of discursive and praxial activity—can help us better to answer the question of whether it is meaningful to use the term “Islamic” to characterize non-Muslims and their actions—and if it *is* meaningful, then in what circumstances.

In addressing this question, the idea of Con-Text as the historically-produced semiosphere of vocabularies and artifacts of meaning-making in terms of Islam is particularly salient. It will be re-called from Chapter 5 that Con-Text is that whole lexicon of meanings that is the product and outcome of previous hermeneutical engagement with Revelation which are already present in the context of a given time and place *as Islam*. Con-Text, it will be recalled, necessarily includes the full encyclopaedia of epistemologies, interpretations, identities, persons and places, structures of authority, textualities and intertextualities, motifs, symbols, values, meaningful questions and meaningful answers, agreements and disagreements, emotions and affinities and affects, aesthetics, modes of saying, doing and being, and other truth-claims and components of existential exploration and meaning-making in terms of Islam that Muslims *acting as Muslims* have produced, and to which Muslims acting as Muslims have attached themselves in the process of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation. As the product of prior hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, Con-Text is, ultimately, both genealogically traceable and semantically attributable to Text and/or Pre-Text whence Con-Text has been elaborated. Con-Text is thus the entire accumulated *lexicon of means and meanings of Islam* that has been historically generated and recorded up to any given moment; it is the full *historical vocabulary of Islam* at any given moment. When a Muslim seeks to make meaning in *terms of Islam*, he does so in engagement with and in use of the existing *terms of engagement*—that is, the existing *vocabulary of Islam*; it is his use of the vocabulary of the Con-Text that makes his discourse and actions recognizably *Islam-ic*.

Can meanings produced by non-Muslims be a part of Con-Text? Obviously: yes. Any unit of meaning produced by a non-Muslim that is invested by Muslims with meaning-making capacity and that is inducted by them into the process of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation becomes a part of the Con-Text: that is to say, it becomes a unit of meaning in terms of Islam. A

tremendously important example of this is the meaning-making discourse of Aristotle and Plato and subsequent Neo-Platonic philosophy, which was adopted by Muslims and incorporated by them as a fundamental element in the activity of making meaning *as Muslims*—that is, the activity of making meaning of Islam (as Franz Rosenthal plainly put it, “Islamic civilization as we know it would simply not have existed without the Greek heritage”).⁶² And when the thirteenth-century author of a major biographical dictionary of philosophers/*ḥukamā'* prefaced his work by attributing to the Prophet the saying “*Hikmah* is the believer’s straying camel; he takes it from wherever he may find it; and does not care from what vessel it has issued,”⁶³ the Prophetic mixed-metaphor is telling us precisely that the Muslim believer regards the “stray” truths of philosophical wisdom as *a Muslim's own truths* wheresoever and with whomsoever he may find them. To the (*prodigious*) extent to which, and particular mode in which, Aristotle, whom the Muslim philosophers called the “First Teacher,” and Plato, whom they called the “Divine Plato [*Aflātūn-i ilāhi*],” are made meaningful (and necessary) in the Muslim hermeneutical engagement with the Truth of Revelation, it is *meaningful* and *necessary* to characterize both these foundational figures as *Islamic*. It is not merely appropriate but is *meaningful* and *necessary* to say *Aristotle is Islamic* and *Plato is Islamic*—which means that Aristotle and Plato are made meaningful by and have particular meaning in the Muslim hermeneutical engagement with Revelation. It is equally necessary to speak of the “*Islamic Aristotle*” and “*Islamic Plato*” as meaning that there are elements of Plato or Aristotle that are *not* made meaningful by and in the Muslim hermeneutical engagement with Revelation. Perhaps a useful way for us to make this *semantic* distinction in our own discourse is by the *nominal* device of, when speaking about the *Islamic Aristotle* or the *Islamic Plato*, referring to them by the names by which they were known by Muslims: *Aristū* and *Aflātūn* (corresponding, perhaps, to the point made in the foregoing treatment of art: namely, that *forms* of art *are* Islamic inasmuch as they are the *vocabulary* by which meaning is expressed in terms of Islam, and that it may be that by the form we, at a *surface* level, *recognize* the art as Islamic). This simple expedient might help to signify the semantic re-location of these two figures: *Aristū* does not, as a historical phenomenon, *mean* and *do* quite the same things as Aristotle; neither does *Aflātūn* *mean* and *do* quite the same things as Plato. Rather they

⁶² Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, London: Routledge, 1992, 14.

⁶³ *al-ḥikmah dāllat al-mu'min ya'khudhu-hā min ḥaythu wajada-hā wa lā yubalī min ayy wi'a'in kharajat*, Shams al-Din al-Shahrazūrī, *Tārikh al-ḥukamā': Nuzhat al-arwāh wa rawdat al-afrah*, Tripoli: Jam'iyyat al-Da'wah al-Islamiyyah al-Ālamiyah, 1988, 34; cited in Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, 34.

both enter into and are made meaningful—meaningful, that is, both in themselves and in the relational production of further meaning—in the semiosphere of the Con-Text of the Revelation of Islam. (For that matter, neither are the Old Testament prophets of the Qur’ān *quite themselves*: Ibrāhīm is not quite Abraham, Mūsā is not quite Moses, ‘Isā is certainly not quite Jesus. In the Con-Text of the Revelation of Islam the names *mean* something different to what they do in the biblical context—something is lost and something is gained in the translation). That Aristotle and Plato were not *Muslims* is simply irrelevant to their meaningful designation as *Islamic*. Muslims identified the ideas of the First Teacher and of the Divine Plato as instances in the world of the T/truth of the Pre-Text—rather in the same manner that they identified the laws of nature as God’s laws—and took them up as *means to meaning* in terms of Islam. To say that Islamic thought is Neo-Platonic is to say that Neo-Platonic thought is made, by Muslims, part and parcel of *Islam*, and that Islam is thereby *made*, in part and in parcel, by Neo-Platonic thought. In other words, it is not merely that “Roman legal principles or Neoplatonism becomes Islamic if interpreted in terms of a system of symbolic knowledge derived from Qur’ānic or other Islamic principles”;⁶⁴ rather, Neo-Platonism and Roman legal principles are even *more* Islamic when they are themselves used as the bases as means by which to *derive* Qur’ānic and other Islamic principles. The point is not merely that Aristotle and Plato are *made* meaningful in terms of Islam by fact of their incorporation in the Con-Text, but rather that Aristū and Aflātūn *make meaning* in terms of Islam by fact of their incorporation in the Con-Text.

There are, of course, innumerable such historical instances where the incorporation into the Con-Text of Islam of epistemologies and meanings produced by non-Muslims in turn make meaning in terms of Islam—including in the natural sciences, signally, with Galenic medicine and Ptolemaic astronomy. We have just discussed how the cosmos at large, and this world in particular, is conceived of as the emplotment in/as the Seen of the Rational Truth of the Unseen Pre-Text of Revelation and that, in devoting themselves to the study of natural science, Muslim scientists were devoting themselves to the identification of God’s truth in His creation. To reiterate: the claim to knowledge of the truth of the working of the world validates itself by means of the constructive, interactive, curative and salvific power of that truth. When that constructive, interactive, curative and salvific power is successfully deployed for human well-being and felicity, the *consonance* of natural science with the Divine Truth is thereby *demonstrated*. It is the *meaningful consequence* of the

⁶⁴ Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 63.

truth of natural science that demonstrates its relation to the Truth of the Divine Source—the Truth of the Pre-Text. Galenic medicine and Ptolemaic astronomy were taken up by Muslims as a sound means by which to apprehend the Truth of God’s Creation as found in the human body and in the heavens: that is to say that they were accepted as working truths of the universe (or, universal truths) that might be applied for human well-being and, as such, to be demonstrably in consonance with Divine Truth to the extent of human understanding. Thus, for more than a millennium, the universal truths of Jālinūs (Galen) and of the *al-Majistī* (the *Almagest* of Ptolemy) were an integral part of the hermeneutical engagement in which Muslims identified the truth and meaning of God’s creation—they were *Islamic* truths.⁶⁵ The degree of Muslims’ self-identification with these universal truths of the working of Divine reason is expressed in the *self-identification* of Muslims with the Greek practitioners of these truths. This is evinced, as Sonja Brentjes has noted, by

epithets such as Imām Ibuqrāt or Shaykh Uqlidis. Praising Muslim scholars as the Hippocrates, Plato, Galen, or Ptolemy of their age was a none too rare element of educational rhetoric . . . al-Sakhawī, for instance, calls Qutb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Aflātūn zamāni-hi* [the Plato of his time] . . . al-Muhibbi quotes his father as saying of the head-physician of Damascus, Ibn Ghazāl al-Himsī, that he was *Ibūqrāt waqtī-hi wa zamāni-hi wa Jālinus ‘asrī-hi* [the Hippocrates of his time and age, and the Galen of his epoch].⁶⁶

In making Jālinus, Ibuqrāt, Aflātūn and Uqlidis personifications in Con-Text of the demonstrated truth of the Unseen as Revealed in the Seen, Muslims were precisely taking non-Muslim figures and making them Islamic figures of meaning—and were making themselves knowers of the Divine truth in terms of these non-Muslim, Islamic figures.

A further, and famous, fictional example of making Con-Text by making non-Muslim figures into Islamic figures of meaning is the adoption by Mus-

⁶⁵ For the ongoing patronage of the natural sciences by ruling elites in societies of Muslims, including the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, see Sonja Brentjes, “Courtly Patronage of the Ancient Sciences in Post-Classical Islamic Societies,” *Al-Qanṭara* 29 (2008) 403–436.

⁶⁶ Brentjes, “On the Location of the Ancient or ‘Rational’ Sciences,” 58, and 69, footnote 58. Similarly, Akbar’s minister, Abu-l-Faḍl ‘Allāmī, referred to his contemporary, the ḥakim-physician Abū-l-Faṭḥ Gilānī as “Jālinus-uz-zamān” (Abū-l-Faḍl, *Har sih daftār*, 2:37), an identification that continued among South Asian Muslims such that “Galen was the big hero of Urdu medical literature. Most texts invoked his name and praised the authors as the ‘Galen of their times,’ ” Alavi, *Islam and Healing*, 211.

lims in their meaning-making of the kingly and heroic myths of pre-Islamic Iran, exemplified in the tenth-century Persian epic poem, the *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsī (d. 1020). While the *Shāhnāmah* is an epic about non-Muslim characters in a pre-Islamic time, it was produced by a Muslim poet (Firdawsī) for a Muslim ruler (Sultān Maḥmūd of Ghaznah, d. 1030), and the dramatic and moral and heroic tales of its non-Muslim characters became the epic of kingship for the Muslim rulers of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. Until its transportation to Europe in the nineteenth century, the *Shāhnāmah* was never read other than in the context of societies of Muslims, and in Islamic Con-Text—of which the epic itself became a part. A revealing example of how the *Shāhnāmah* was given meaning in and by Con-Text, and was itself made a part of Con-Text, is the lines of a panegyric poem addressed by the twelfth-century poet, Khāqānī Shīrvānī (1122–1190) to the Atābeg Muẓaffar-ud-Dīn Qızıl-Arsalan Ildigiz (regnant 1186–1191) whose father, Shams al-Dīn Ildigiz, was a Qipchaq Turk military slave in the service of the Saljuqs who became ruler of Azerbaijan:

This successor is the Tūrān-seizing Rustam, by whose glory
To Ildigiz the kingdom of Kay Khusraw was rendered!

In the single reflection of his wine-cup are manifest two worlds—
for in its clearness
The fountain of Khiżr and the life-mirror of Iskandar are rendered!

The Atābeg is like Farīdūn: there is no fear even should the
Unbelievers,
As terrible as Žāhħāk, or as evil as the dragon, be rendered!

The Atābeg is, in divine support, like Muhammad—in qualities, like
Alexander:
These two—though orphaned—sustainers of dominions were
rendered!⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Rustam-i Tūrān sitān-ast īn khalaft k-az farr-i ū / Ildigiz rā mulk-i Kay Khusraw tuyassar sākhtand // ‘aks-i yak jāmish du gīti mīnumāyad k-az safā-sh / āb-i khiżr u ā’inah-‘i jān-i Sikandar sākhtand // hast Atābeg chun Farīdūn nīst bāk ar kāfirān / khwīshtan Žāhħāk-shūr u azhdahāsharr sākhtand // . . . // hast Atābeg Muṣṭafā-ta'yid u Iskandar-khişāl / k-in du rā ham dar yatīmī mulk-parvar sākhtand*, Afzal-ud-Dīn Badil b. ‘Alī Najjār Khāqānī Shīrvānī, *Dīvān-i Khāqānī Shīrvānī* (edited by Žiyā-ud-Dīn Sajjādī), Tehran: Zavvār, 1357 sh [1978], 113, cited by Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, “Le Shāh-nāme, la gnose soufie et le pouvoir Mongol,” *Journal Asiatique* 272 (1984) 249–337, at 293–294 (compare the French translation).

Here Qızıl-Arsalan is presented, first, as the greatest warrior-hero of the *Şâhnâmah*, Rustam, the champion of the ruler Kay Khusraw, who defeated all the enemies of Kay Khusraw, and thereby established his rule over Tûrân. Qızıl-Arsalan, who ultimately succeeded Ildigiz, is then presented in the next couplet as Kay Khusraw himself *via* the image of his wine-cup which is cast as the wine-cup of Kay Khusraw in which, in the account of the *Şâhnâmah*, that model king could see the unseen. The wine-cup of Qızıl-Arsalan is, in turn, linked to two more figures, Khiżr (Khiḍr) and Iskandar (Alexander the Great), who possess the dual resonance of being, at once, characters both in the Qur'an and in the *Şâhnâmah*. The apposition of the two in the hemistich evokes their incarnation in the *Şâhnâmah* (in the Qur'an, Khiḍr is linked to Mūsâ/Moses), where Iskandar accompanies Khiżr on a quest for the water of eternal life. In that narrative, Khiżr makes it to the spring of eternal life, and attains immortality, but Iskandar loses his way. Iskandar does, of course, become figuratively immortal through his achievements in this world, one of which is the invention, under his patronage, of the object that serves as the most important image in the literature expressing the Muslim's quest to know real-truth exactly as it is: the mirror. Thus, Figure 7 is a sixteenth-century Mughal miniature painting illustrating the account in the *Sikandarnâmah* of Khâqâni's contemporary, Niżâmî (1141–1209) of the invention of the mirror in the presence of Sikandar and his court (all of whom are depicted in this painting as thoroughly and indigenously Mughal). The text in the painting includes the lines

You, too, if you look into that mirror,
Will take to hand the constitution of Alexander!

And the passage concludes (off-folio):

Come, saki! That mirror-like cup
Give to me! For, the hand is the best place for the wine-cup!
When, from that cup, I have become of the constitution of Kay-Khusraw,
So will I, from that illumined cup, have become world-seeing!⁶⁸

Also, it is narrated that Iskandar erects atop the lighthouse of Alexandria (al-Iskandariyyah) a mirror in which everything can be seen for a distance of

⁶⁸ *tū nīz ar dar ān āyīnah bingarī / bih dast ārī āyīn-i Iskandarī // . . . biyā sāqī ān jām-i āyinah-fām / bih-man dih kih bar dast bih jāy-i jām // chu z-ān jām Kay-Khusraw-āyīn shavam / bi-dān jām-i rawshan jahān-bīn shavam*, Niżâmî, *Kulliyât-i Niżâmî*, 2: *Sharafnâmah*, 123, line 1704, and 124, lines 1709–1710.

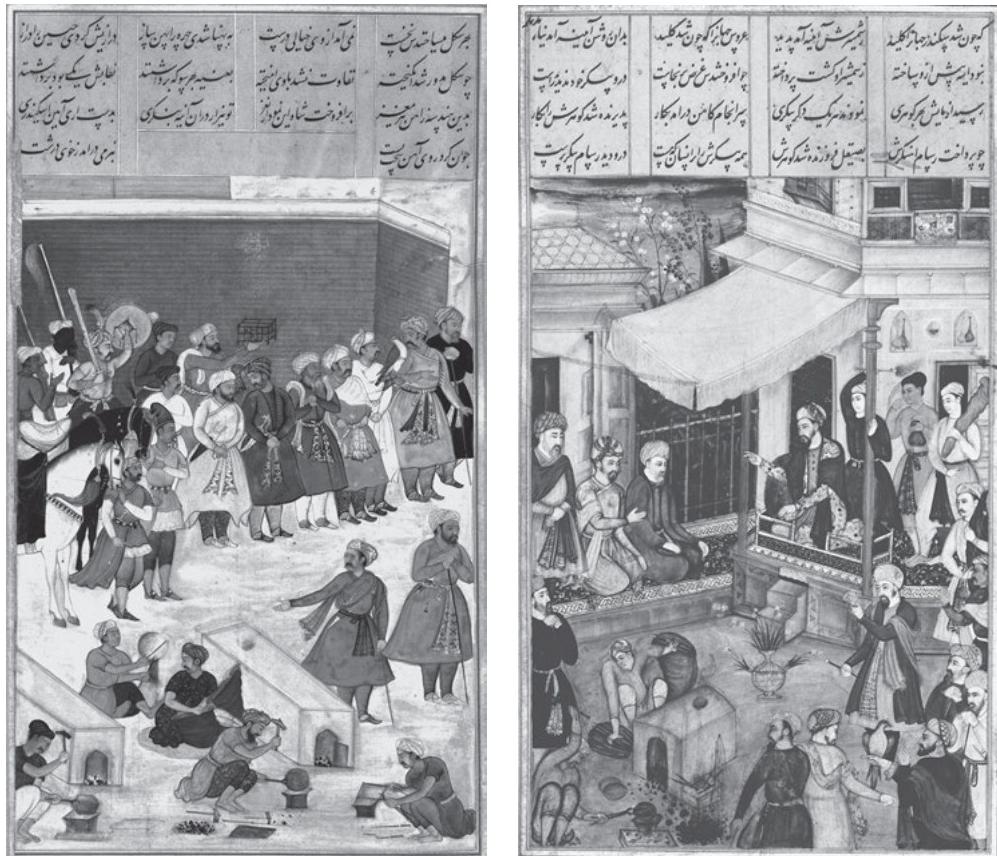


FIGURE 7. A two-panel miniature painted in Lahore *circa* 1595 by Nanhā for the copy of the *Sikandarnāmah* of Nizāmī prepared for the Mughal Emperor Akbar, illustrating the invention of the mirror in the presence of Iskandar / Alexander the Great (Courtesy, the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore).

sixty furlongs: it is the mirror of the world. The significance of Iskandar's association with the mirror of the world can be seen in the fact that Amīr Khushraw of Delhi entitled his Alexander-epos "The Mirror of Iskandar" (*Āyinah-i Sikandarī*). In other words, the life-mirror of Iskandar encompasses in its reflection the physical (Seen) world, while the water of the fountain of Khiżr encompasses in its reflection the eternal (Unseen) world. The great Muslim ruler is the one whose vision encompasses both.⁶⁹ That this concept

⁶⁹ The continuing relevance of Iskandar (Alexander the Great) in the consciousness of the

was central to the construction of rulership is indicated by Khāqānī's recycling the same image in another panegyric, this time to his major patron, the ruler of Shīrvān and Qarabāgh, Abū-l-Muzāffar Ākhistān,⁷⁰ of whom Khāqānī proclaimed, "See the King of the World who, like Kay Khusraw / in one reflection of his cup reveals the two worlds."⁷¹ In the context of a society of Muslims, the first resonance of the idea of "the two worlds" is the Seen and the Unseen—the two sides of Revelation of Truth. (We have already observed how, five hundred years later, the wine-cup of Jahāngīr proclaimed him "The Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical"—that is, of the signs of the world of Iskandar and the world of Khiżr). Here, the wine-cup of Kay Khusraw, and the non-Qur'ānic incarnations of Khiżr and Iskandar are all *Islamic* in meaning.

The next couplet—"The Atābeg is like Farīdūn: there is no fear even should the Unbelievers / As terrible as Žāhāk, or as evil as the dragon, be rendered!"—is an even more straightforward example of this. Here, the Atabeg is likened to one of the central characters of the *Shāhnāmah*, the good and heroic king, Farīdūn, who fought and killed the personification of evil, Žāhāk, and who (in the *Avesta*) kills also the dragon-serpent (*azhdahā*) that is the incarnation of the evil which Žāhāk personifies in the *Shāhnāmah*⁷² (see Figure 8, where Žāhāk is portrayed with serpents growing from his shoulders). Now, what is striking here is that the Atabeg is likened to Farīdūn in his capacity as warrior for Islam against the Unbelievers (who are likened to Žāhāk and the dragon-serpent). But, obviously (and not even strictly speaking), Farīdūn was himself an Unbeliever. By personifying Qızıl-Arsalan-the-Islamic-warrior as Farīdūn-the-non-Muslim-warrior, the couplet is investing Farīdūn and his actions with the same value as the Muslim ruler and his actions: Farīdūn is, therein, squarely made an artifact of Islamic meaning (one

Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex may be gauged by the fact that my project of collecting early printed books from India has to date garnered at least twenty-five different editions of the *Sikandarnāmah* of Niẓāmī published in Lucknow, Kampur, Delhi, Bombay, and Lahore in the fifty years between 1864 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 (see the online catalogue of Harvard University library).

⁷⁰ Ž. Sajjādī, "Akestān," in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982–, 1:718–719.

⁷¹ *bi-shāh-i jahān bīn kih Kay Khusraw āsā / zi-yak 'aks-i jāmish du kayhān numāyad*, Khāqānī, *Divān-i Khāqānī Shīrvānī*, 118, cited in Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, "Khwājeh Naṣir and the Iranian Past," in N. Pourjavady and Ž. Vesel (editors), *Naṣir al-Dīn Tūsi: Philosophe et savant du xiiie siècle*, Tehran: Presses Universitaires d'Iran / Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 2000, 69–104, at 85 (compare the translation).

⁷² See Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Aždahā ii. In Persian Literature," in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982–, 3.2:199–203.

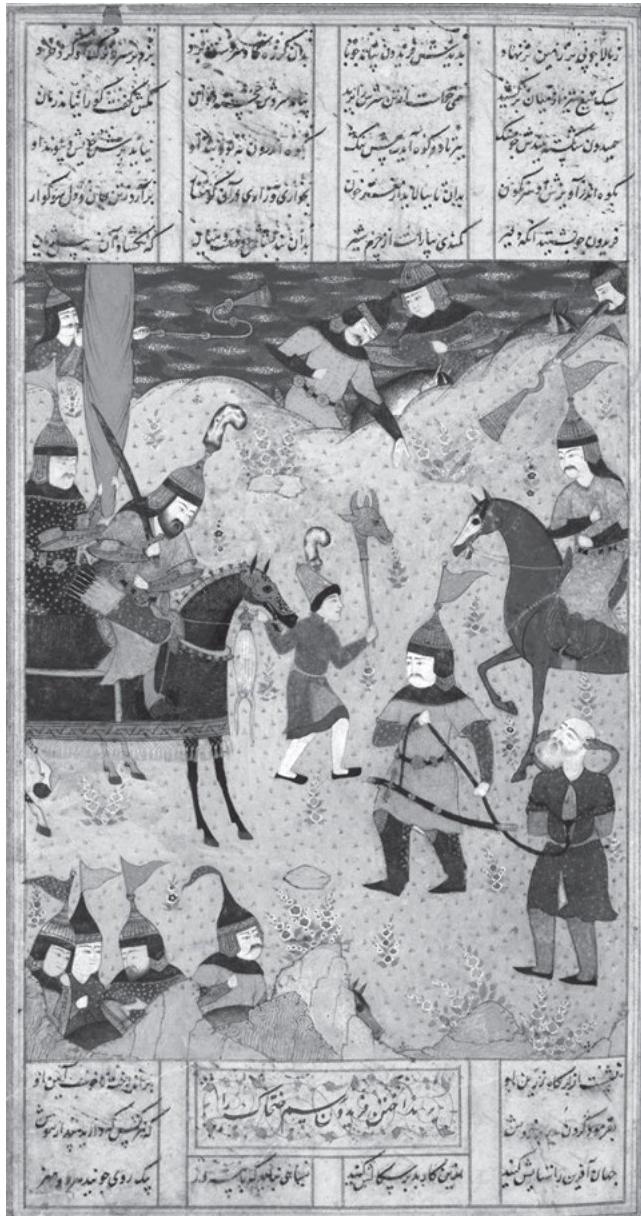


FIGURE 8. Miniature painted in Iran circa 1544 illustrating a scene from the *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawṣī, the epic of the pre-Islamic kings of Iran, depicting the evil Žāhhāk brought in submission before the heroic king, Faridūn. See above for how the Muslim poet Khāqānī identifies his Muslim patron, Ildigiz, with the (non-Muslim) Faridūn (Courtesy, Princeton University Library).

might even say that he is made an “honorary Muslim,” in the way that a non-citizen of a particular country can nonetheless be made the *representative* of that country as “honorary consul”).

Finally, the last couplet leaves one in no doubt that the society that is the audience of this poem regarded themselves and their rulers *fully* as heirs to Islam (it will be recalled that these are the very Saljuqs who, as seen in Chapter 3, Lapidus said “were not considered inherently Islamic,”⁷³ and the very “amirs, kings and sultans” who, Crone said, were “devoid of legal status and moral significance” and whom Muslims “could never see as intrinsically Islamic”).⁷⁴ The Saljuq Atabeg rules like the Prophet Muḥammad, by Divine Support; meaning that he upholds the Divine Order in the World—which he, in turn, does by his Iskandar-like qualities. And here, accompanying the pairing of the Atabeg with Muḥammad and Iskandar, is the pairing of Iskandar with Muḥammad in the shared quality of their being orphans raised to world-rulership.⁷⁵ It is not just the Atabeg who is likened to Unbelievers, but the Prophet of Islam is made meaningful in terms of the Unbeliever, Iskandar, and Iskandar is, in turn, made meaningful in terms of the Prophet of Islam.⁷⁶ The rulership of the Atabeg is constructed and legitimated in interrelated terms of Muḥammadan rulership and of the *Shāhnāmah* in a single integrated and indissoluble field of Islamic meaning. These pre-Islamic models of rulership are *Islamic* Con-Text.

So, Arisṭū, Aflāṭūn, Jälīnūs, Rustam, Kay Khusraw and Iskandar are all representatives of the innumerable instances of the incorporation and making by Muslim actors of units of meaning of non-Muslim provenance into the Con-Text of Islam. What are we to do, however, with the reverse case: which is to say, how do we designate the non-Muslim actor who takes up units of meaning from the field of meaning of Islam and incorporates them into his existence *but remains a non-Muslim*? It will be recalled from Chapter 3 that this is one of the problems which Marshall Hodgson hoped to solve by his neologism “Islamicate,” namely, how to categorize ideas and behaviours that are evidently related to Islam, but which are thought and performed by peo-

⁷³ Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” 13.

⁷⁴ Crone, *God’s Rule*, 146–147.

⁷⁵ K. A. Luther, “Atābakān-e-Ādarbayjān,” in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982-, 1:890–894.

⁷⁶ For the construction of Iskandar as “conqueror, philosopher, and prophet” in the *Iskandarnāmah* of Nizāmī, see Johann-Christoph Bürgel, “Conquérant, philosophe et prophète: l’image d’Alexandre le Grand dans l’épopée de Nezāmī,” in Christophe Balaÿ, Claire Kappler and Živa Vesel (editors), *Pand-o Sokhan: Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1995, 65–78.

ple who are not themselves Muslims (it will be recalled that, for Hodgson, *faith* is the supreme criteria for “Islam/Islamic,” and that he thus insists that the “Islamic” can only issue from Muslims: the ideas and behaviours of non-Muslims *cannot* be called Islamic).

I should like here to present an example from rural India. Historically, in the villages of the Punjab, when Sikh wrestlers go down into the pit to fight, their battle-cry before *committing themselves* in combat is the shout *Yā ‘Alī!*⁷⁷ The invocation is, of course, of the Fourth Caliph of Islam, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, whose status as the model of chivalric youth and warrior-courage (*fatā, javānmard*), noted in Chapter 5, is summed up in the popular Arabic refrain known throughout the Balkans-to-Bengal complex and beyond: *lā fatā illā ‘Alī lā sayfa illā Dhū al-Faqār*, “There is no young-warrior save ‘Alī, there is no sword save Dhū al-Faqār.” In fighting in the cause of Islam, Muslim warriors of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex—emperors and footsoldiers alike—viewed themselves as incarnations of the ideal of ‘Alī, the Lion of God (*shēr-i yazdān*). ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is, in other words, a semantic unit in the Con-Text of Revelation of Islam; that is, the lemma “Ali” is a *definitional* lexical element in the vocabulary of Islam by which Muslims articulate and make meaningful the (rather serious) business of fighting in the cause of Islam. For those Muslims who mobilize the semantic unit “Ali” in the context of fighting in the cause of Islam, to be a warrior for Islam is to be *no young-warrior save ‘Alī*. Now, if we analyze the act of the non-Muslim wrestler who cries *Yā ‘Alī*, we find that he is straightforwardly doing the following: he is making meaning for himself by hermeneutical engagement with the Con-Text of Revelation of Islam. At the moment when the wrestler goes down into the pit of combat, when he screws his courage to the sticking place for the grappling of sinew and spirit that is to come, his being and identity—*who he is*—are first and foremost: the wrestler, the warrior, the heroic young-man. When, in that condition, he calls upon ‘Alī, he does so because to be the wrestler, the warrior, the young-man is to *be* ‘Alī: the Sikh wrestler *gives meaning to his Self by this engagement with the Con-Text of the Revelation of Islam*. In this moment, the Sikh wrestler is not a Muslim: but he has *committed himself to meaning-making in terms of Islam*. His act is *precisely* an Islamic act—it is *meaningful in terms of Islam*. Just as a Muslim makes meaning for himself in terms of Islam by engagement with the Con-Text of Revelation—the meaning of which ultimately derives from hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text and/or Text—so does a non-Muslim. It

⁷⁷ This is on the testimony of the great Sikh poet, Kuñwar Mahindrā Singh Bēdi “Sahar” (1920–1992, himself a direct descendant of Gūrū Nānak, the founder of the Sikh community); see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPRffJNrYAs>.

is the *commitment of the self to the making of meaning in terms of the hermeneutical engagement with the Revelation of Islam* that makes the action of the non-Muslim actor *Islamic*. Of course, I am *not* saying that this is not also and simultaneously a Sikh act by a Sikh actor: it is. Our Sikh wrestler does not cease to be Sikh when he shouts *Yā ‘Alī*, nor does he cease to conceive of his meaning-making action as Sikh. But he is a Sikh making (meaning for) himself in terms of Islam. The point here is that the same—or rather the mirror-opposite—process is taking place for the category “Sikh” as is taking place for the category “Islam”: the Islamic is being made by the Sikh, and the Sikh is being made by the Islamic.⁷⁸ The act is one, but the categorical meanings of the act are more than one.⁷⁹

Or, to take another example: Phillip Wagoner in a fascinating study shows how, when the fifteenth-century court of the South Indian kingdom of Vijayanagar found itself a Hindu island in an ocean defined by Islamic imperial norms and values, not only did the ruler assume the title “Sultan among the Hindu kings,” but the court adopted, as courtly dress, in place of Brahman garb, “garment types that had originated in the Islamic world”—namely, “the *kabāyi*, a long tunic, derived from the Arab *qabā’*, and the *kullāyi*, a high, conical cap of brocaded fabric, derived from the Perso-Turkic *kulāh*.” Noting that there is no conversion to Islam or doctrinal syncreticism accompanying this process, Wagoner finds it expedient to adopt what he calls Hodgson’s “crucial” distinction between Islamic (religious) and Islamicate (cultural), and characterizes the process at stake as “Islamicization . . . the process of becoming Islamicate,” that is “as cultural change.” For Wagoner, the phenomenon he has so skillfully identified is no more than “a political strategy . . . effected through the adoption of certain Islamic cultural forms and practices which—given the political nature of the process—largely pertain to the broader sphere of secular culture, as opposed to the narrower domain of formal religion,”⁸⁰ (which latter would be accurately called, in Wagoner’s Hodgsonian terms, “Islamization” rather than “Islamicization”).⁸¹ Now, the problem with Wag-

⁷⁸ Also, to the measure in which ‘Ali is being re-made in Sikh terms, the Islamic is being made Sikh.

⁷⁹ Mahir Şaul has provided a number of telling examples in West Africa of how “the canvas of meanings deposited by Islam . . . shaped people and milieus well beyond the ranks of confessed Muslims” in societies which are today “saturated with Islamic elements” including what he calls “para-Islamic ritual complexes.” Of particular interest is his presentation of “conflict with Muslims as one possible path to Islamic influence,” Mahir Şaul, “Islam and West African Anthropology,” *Africa Today* 53 (2006) 3–33, at 3–4, 23, 25, and 24.

⁸⁰ Phillip B. Wagoner, “Sultan Among the Hindu Kings’: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (1996) 851–880, at 853–855.

⁸¹ Wagoner, “Sultan Among the Hindu Kings”, 855.

oner's diagnostic is that his insistence on the boundary between religion and culture results, in turn, in his viewing the historical event at stake in formal and instrumental terms ("a political strategy")—as if, somehow, the "universal and consistent"⁸² putting off at the Vijayanagari court of Brahman dress and their adoption of "Sultanic" dress does not in any way express a re-conceptualizing and re-valorizing of the courtly *body* in Islamic terms, *a change in meaning*. Certainly Wagoner is not unaware that, "in the Indic system, prior to the impact of Islamicate culture, the body was viewed as an integral aspect of the person and, as such, was held to reflect the inner state and qualities of the individual," to which conceptualization the "Islamicate stands in direct opposition" because "the uncovered body is held to be naked and shameful, and it is said that clothing has been provided by God to cover a man's nakedness."⁸³ It is difficult to see how the adoption of Islamic dress does not involve a change in meaning of the body—an intimately profound (that is, *meaningful*) aspect of self-conception in any society, let alone the Hindu/Indic. My point, then, is that by taking on Islamic dress, the Vijayanagari court enters into the Islamic field of meaning, and quite literally covers its body with this meaning—that is, with *Islam*.⁸⁴ The actions and garments of the Vijayanagari courtiers are thus *Islamic*—they are the making of meaning for the self in terms of Islam (terms that are present in and taken from the semiosphere of the Con-Text of Revelation). As with the Sikh wrestler, here the Islamic (act) is being made by the Hindu, and the Hindu is being made by the Islamic (act).

The above two examples are relatively local instances of non-Muslims drawing on semantic elements of the Con-Text of Islam in order to make meaning for the self. In both these instances it is clear that the meaningful way in which to conceptualize these local actions is as *Islamic*. How, then, are we to conceptualize and categorize larger projects of meaning-making by non-Muslim communities that draw substantially on the Con-Text of Islam—such as the theological and legal discourse of the Jewish communities who lived for centuries, not only under the rule of Muslims, but in an environment of meaning saturated by Islam? Sarah Stroumsa has said of Jewish theology,

⁸² Wagoner, "Sultan Among the Hindu Kings," 868.

⁸³ Wagoner, "Sultan Among the Hindu Kings," 864–865.

⁸⁴ The fact that the adoption of Islamic dress, as Wagoner notes, took place only at court and did not extend, for example, to the performance of Hindu rituals means simply that the Vijayanagaris constructed for themselves a world inflected by spatially differentiated registers of meaning where the "intensely performative and public" rituals in one space and for one audience were wrapped in one fabric of meaning, and the rituals in another space and for another audience were wrapped in another fabric of meaning (the phrase "intensely performative and public" is used by Wagoner for activities at court; "Sultan Among the Hindu Kings," 871).

“The development of Jewish systematic theology takes place under Islam and mostly in Arabic . . . As Arabic came to replace both Hebrew and Aramaic as the main cultural language of the Jews, the intellectual activity of eastern Jews became an integral part of the intellectual Islamic scene. On the whole, works of Jewish *kalam* are constructed along the same lines as works of Muslim *kalam*. They employ the same dialectical techniques and formulas and explore the same conventional topics . . . This general scheme is so closely akin to Muslim *kalam* that, at first sight, only the prooftexts appear to be different.”⁸⁵ Joel L. Kraemer has noted that “Medieval Jewish thought flourished under the aegis of Islamic civilization from the ninth through the thirteenth centuries when the venue shifted to the Christian West. Its language was Arabic, its concerns determined by issues raised in the context of Islamic thought.”⁸⁶ The reader will recall from Chapter 2 the concluding remarks of Sarah Pessin in her study of “The Influence of Islamic Thought on Maimonides”: “As is clear from the representative quotes from Islamic sources cited throughout . . . understanding the Islamic philosophical context of the Guide is key for understanding the intricacies of Maimonides’ thought,”⁸⁷ and may also recall that more than one scholar has “argued for a substantial influence of Muslim law (*fiqh*) on Maimonides’ jurisprudence.”⁸⁸ If the concerns of Jewish theology in this period were informed and shaped by the Islamic Con-Text (“determined by issues raised in the Islamic context”) to the point that they took the same fundamental forms and asked the same fundamental questions such that in order to understand the *meaning* of Jewish theology one needs to understand the Islamic Con-Text, then why not call these processes wherein Jews are making Judaism meaningful for themselves in terms of Islam “Islamic Jewish thought”—which would seem to be a more meaningful designation than any other we have? As I noted in Chapter 2, we have no difficulty terming Islamic philosophy Neo-Platonic (and not Neo-Platonic-ate); it seems that the only consideration that might restrain us from calling Maimonides an Islamic Jewish thinker is our ingrained scruples (if not horror) about qualifying one “religious” category by another—as if to do so is somehow a violation of the necessary *integrity* of a “religious” category. But if we put aside the

⁸⁵ Sarah Stroumsa, “Saadya and Jewish Kalam,” in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (editors), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 71–90, at 73–74.

⁸⁶ Joel L. Kraemer, “The Islamic Context of Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (editors), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 38–68, at 38.

⁸⁷ Pessin, “The Influence of Islamic Thought on Maimonides.”

⁸⁸ Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, 66.

category of “religion” and focus on *meaning*, then “Islamic Jewish” is, straightforwardly and without prejudice, the most *meaningful* term.⁸⁹

Thus, *whether or not an actor is Muslim is irrelevant to the matter of whether or not the act or the product of the act is Islamic*. What matters is the means to meaning—and the commitment of the self to that meaning; what matters in the case of the non-Muslim is *hermeneutical engagement* with Con-Text of Revelation to Muhammad. It is that hermeneutical engagement with Revelation that makes the act of the non-Muslim *Islamic*.⁹⁰

There are a couple of further permutations that, in the interest of thoroughness, had best to be addressed. What if a non-Muslim engages with the Con-Text of Revelation without any investment in that engagement to produce meaning for his own self? Two examples come to mind. One is that of a non-Muslim architect who designs a mosque—for which he engages extensively and profoundly with the vocabulary and forms of Con-Text—but without necessarily making meaning for *himself* out of the vocabulary and forms (perhaps I am underestimating the meaningfulness of the architect’s relation-

⁸⁹ Hodgson’s term “Islamicate” has recently been taken up in the title of an academic journal, *The Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, which describes its project as follows: “In the medieval, late medieval and pre-modern world of Islam, Muslims, Jews and Christians constituted a unique cultural and intellectual commonality. They shared a language, Arabic (and at times Persian), which they spoke in daily life and which they also used for their theological, philosophical, legal and scientific writings. Moreover, they often read the same books, so that a continuous, multi-dimensional exchange of ideas, texts, and forms of discourse was the norm rather than the exception. While this has been amply demonstrated for some selected periods and regions, scholars usually opt for a one-dimensional approach with an (often exclusive) focus on either Muslim, Jewish or Christian authors and their writings. The journal *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* provides a forum for research that systematically crosses the boundaries between three major disciplines of academia and research, viz. Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, and the study of (Eastern) Christianity. It encourages discussion among representatives of these and related disciplines, with a view to promoting a new understanding of intellectual history in all its facets throughout the Islamicate world, from its emergence until modern times and from different methodological perspectives. *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* covers such themes as philosophy, theology, exegesis, law and legal methodology, sciences and medicine.” <http://www.brill.com/publications/journals/intellectual-history-islamicate-world>. http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/islamwiss/Intellectual_History_in_the_Islamicate_World/index.html. In the conceptual terms I am putting forward, the journal would meaningfully be called *Intellectual History of the Islamic World*.

⁹⁰ Allan Bäck has made a worthy attempt to expand the scope of the term “Islamic” in “Islamic philosophy”: “We may then define ‘Islamic philosophy’ as ‘a philosophical inquiry informed by the texts, traditions and experiences of Muslims’. In this way, Islamic philosophers need not be devout Muslims . . . Still, they will be reacting to and thinking in the motifs of the prevailing culture,” Allan Bäck, “Islamic Logic?” in Shahid Rahman, Tony Street, and Hassan Tahiri (editors), *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition: Science, Logic, Epistemology and their Interactions*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2009, 255–279, at 260. My point is that these Muslims and non-Muslims are not just thinking and reacting, but are making meaning for themselves in terms of Islam, and are articulating and committing themselves to that meaning.

ship with his product). Is this process Islamic? The answer is that while the architect's act is not Islamic, the *product* of the act is Islamic in that it is made meaningful in terms of Islam by those who see the mosque and recognize from the vocabulary of Con-Text the meaning of its form, or by those who pray in it and make the mosque meaningful by their expression of meaning (prayer), and make their expression of meaning meaningful by (praying in) the mosque. An *Islamic* product can perfectly well be made by a non-Muslim. Another example that may be adduced here is the porcelain wine-bowls made in China for export to the markets of the Islamic world that were manufactured with inscriptions from the *Dīvān* of Hāfiẓ. Here, the *Islamic* meaning of the wine-bowl is made, in the first instance, by its inscription—which means nothing to its Chinese manufacturer, but everything to its Muslim buyer and user.⁹¹

A parallel example is that of the non-Muslim scholar of Islam who engages extensively and profoundly with Text and Con-Text to produce his scholarship about Islam. Is this process Islamic? Again, the answer is: the non-Muslim scholar's act of producing his scholarship is not Islamic, but if his scholarship about Islam is taken up by Muslims as a part of an act of meaning-making in terms of Islam, then it has been entered into the Con-Text and has become Islamic—for example, if a Muslim takes up the argument made by a non-Muslim scholar against the authenticity of Hadith, and uses it in making a normative statement about Islam, then the dictum of the non-Muslim scholar has become part of the Con-Text of Islam.

This last inquiry brings us full circle to the final question: that of the practice by Muslims of ideas and actions of entirely non-Islamic provenance which appear to be at odds with Islam. As Timothy Daniels describes Muslims in contemporary Java:

Local people's interpretations and practices of *ziarah*, entering trance states, and *slametan* indicate a broad continuum of religious variation. People have blended their beliefs in, and ritual interaction and communication with, ancestors, spirits, and gods with Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic concepts, doctrines and practices in a variety of complex ways. Although particular people across local society emphasize one or another points along this continuum, there are no clear cut divisions between one sort of blending and another; they grade into each other in complex ways. Moreover, people change their commitments to particular

⁹¹ There is a fine sixteenth-/seventeenth-century example of such a bowl in the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts (object number AE 85783).

beliefs and practices over time tightening and loosening their grip on particular cultural resources as they weave their worlds of meaning and action . . . “Javanese Islam” appears to be located through a complex spectrum of variants . . . of diverse cultural resources and modes of interpretation along this Islamic spectrum⁹² . . . In addition, local people still contest the meanings of these categories and the cultural elements they are assumed to entail, all claiming to be “real” Muslims or “good” Muslims in different ways.⁹³

Daniels is describing the sort of scene that has often been (though not by him) identified as an exotic instance of “syncretism” on the margins of the Islamic world. The concept of syncretism is premised on the idea that a “pure form” of Islam is interacting with something that is not Islam to produce something—the syncretic product—that is “less-than-pure Islam”—that is less than properly Islam/ic.⁹⁴ When Islam is conceptualized as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, we are now able to move beyond the lens of “syncretism” to a more capacious understanding. We have seen repeatedly that the idea that the Truth of Pre-Text exists beyond the Text has enabled Muslims routinely *to find Pre-Textual meaning in extra-Textual form*. Here, the various “Hindu-Buddhist” elements are maintained by Javanese Muslims as being in consonance with the universal Truth of the Pre-Text of Revelation. When Javanese Muslims in their different ways (“spectrum of variants”) “blended their beliefs in, and ritual interaction and communication with, ancestors, spirits, and gods with Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic concepts, doctrines and practices in a variety of complex ways,” they are all differently doing the same thing: namely, making objects and actions *meaningful* (“weave worlds of meaning and action”) in terms of the vocabulary of Islam—and are making the Con-Text of Islam in this process.⁹⁵

What Daniels describes as “blending”—the mixing of a thing with another—is thus more meaningfully conceptualized as an act of making things *cohere*, that is, of making things meaningful together *on the same terms*. Else,

⁹² Timothy Daniels, *Islamic Spectrum in Java*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, 47–48, 50.

⁹³ Daniels, *Islamic Spectrum in Java*, 50.

⁹⁴ On the deficiencies of the concept of “syncretism,” which “hinges on the assumption that those observed have inappropriately mixed cultural and religious categories that are intrinsically alien to each other” and which “has almost without fail served to relegate its subjects to a secondary status,” see Tony K. Stewart and Carl W. Ernst, “Syncretism,” in Margaret A. Mills, Peter J. Claus, and Sarah Diamond (editors), *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 586–588, at 586.

⁹⁵ For this same process going on at the other end of the Islamic world, see Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*.

what we have is not a coherent *blend*, not a *solution* (in both senses of the word), but a suspension in which things are inchoately mixed together and where they will, in a state of rest, eventually separate out.⁹⁶ Muslims make meaning of new objects and combinations of objects in terms of Islam precisely when they conceptualize the involvement of themselves in these objects and actions as *coherent with being Muslim* (as coherent with Islam). Once the object or action—whether of Hindu or Buddhist or Orientalist provenance—has been made meaningful in terms of Islam, it is now an *Islamic* semantic unit in the Con-Text of Revelation. Its coherence might be accepted by some and disputed by others (“local people contest the meanings of these categories”) but all the contestants are making the argument of coherent meaning for the self in terms of Islam (“all claiming to be ‘real’ Muslims or ‘good’ Muslims”).

This is probably as good a juncture as any at which to address the question from which there is no escape in this day and age: can one speak meaningfully of “Islamic violence”? As long as the Muslim actor is making his act of violence meaningful to himself in terms of Islam—in terms of Pre-Text, Text, or Con-Text of Revelation—then it is appropriate and meaningful to speak of that act of violence as Islamic violence. The point of the designation is *not* that Islam *causes* this violence; rather it is that the violence is made meaningful by the actor in terms of Islam—just as the prodigious violence undertaken by soldiers of democratic nation-states is made *meaningful* for them and by them in terms of the nation-state, and may, therefore, meaningfully be called “democratic violence” or “national violence” (or may meaningfully be designated in terms of the particular nation-state as “American violence” or “Israeli violence”).⁹⁷

In the case of violence, as with everything else, one Muslim may disagree with another Muslim over whether his mode of meaning-making is legitimate—that is to say, whether it is *coherent* with its source—and may on those terms of incoherence deem the professed Muslim actor a non-Muslim (all heresy is ultimately a dispute over coherence) but this is not the point here. The point here—as everywhere else—is whether the actor makes the act meaningful for himself in terms of Islam.

⁹⁶ I discovered only after writing this passage that Stewart and Ernst use the same metaphor of “suspension and solution” to analyze “syncretism”—which must say something about the metaphorical workings of the scholarly mind! See Stewart and Ernst, “Syncretism,” 587.

⁹⁷ Indeed, in the case of the violence perpetrated by democratic nation-states, the causal or authorial link between the entity of meaningful designation (the nation-state) and the violence is, if anything, much more direct.



It was stated at the outset of this chapter that conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation should help us to cultivate the *analytical habit* of looking for and locating Islamic norms, not in the singularity of disciplinary isolation but, rather, as those Islamic norms are, in fact, *differentially generated and articulated in social and discursive and praxial diffusion in the lives of Muslims*—and, indeed, in the foregoing, we have encountered an ample and varied range of Islamic norms and normativities. This being the case, it ought by now to be patently clear that we should discard, for once and for all, the impoverished legal-supremacist conceptual habit that stubbornly insists that: “The respect for normative pluralism (*ikhtilāf*) is possible only because the *fiqh* scholars conceive an ontological difference between the knowledge as revealed by God in Koranic texts, the prophet’s praxis or the community’s consensus on the one hand, and the knowledge which human beings acquire through their own reasoning.”⁹⁸ It *may* be the case that *juridical* pluralism “is possible only because the *fiqh* scholars conceive an ontological difference” (a difference that distinguishes between the *shari‘ah* as the law with God, and *fiqh* as man’s limited and potentially fallible understanding of the *shari‘ah*), yet *normative* pluralism in Islam is a much more vast and complex business—both in ontology and in society—than is the confined undertaking of the *fiqh* scholars. As we have seen, the sources of normative pluralism in human and historical Islam lie, in the first instance, far beyond, behind and above the law—they are located in the very spatial-structural logic of Divine Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text. The hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation generates *varied and contradictory normative*

⁹⁸ Baber Johansen, *Contingency in a Sacred Law: Legal and Ethical Norms in the Muslim Fiqh*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999, 65–66. To be more than fair to Johansen, he makes this statement in the context of an essay on “The Muslim Fiqh as a Sacred Law”; nonetheless, as is typical of scholars of Islamic law, he associates “Islamic normativeness” solely with *shari‘ah* (i.e., no *tarīqah*, *haqīqah*, or anything else; *Contingency in a Sacred Law*, 39), and nowhere entertains the notion that there might be a source or arbiter of “normative pluralism” other than “sacred law” (see the approving citation of this statement by Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 244). Standard in the literature are normative statements such as: “*Ikhtilāf* basically operates in the realm of *Fiqh*. The dogma of Islam and its moral teachings are not open to *ikhtilāf*. Even the slightest disagreement over the normative validity of belief in the essentials of the faith, its five pillars, for example, and the essence of moral virtue is not tolerated and the ‘*ulamā*’ have spoken in no uncertain terms on this,” Muhammad Hashim Kamali, “The Scope of Diversity and *Ikhtilāf* (Juristic Disagreement) in the *Shari‘ah*,” *Islamic Studies* 37 (1998) 315–337, at 316.

truths through a far broader range of trajectories and apparatuses and epistemologies than those of the *fiqh* scholars alone.

Indeed, the parameters of legal pluralism⁹⁹—while nothing less than remarkable in and of themselves—are probably the narrowest and least pluralistic of those of any of the discourses of Muslims, for the simple reason that legal truth is *public*, *prescriptive* and as far as possible *unambiguous*—as George Makdisi said of the *faqīh*-jurisprudent's options in any given situation, “There was only consent or dissent; the system made no room for abstentions.”¹⁰⁰ This is clearly not the case with private(-public)/(public-)private, explorative discourses which have the scope to live with ambiguity and in ambivalence—that is, *to suspend judgement*—and to entertain a wide range and diverse register of norms and contradictions that the law simply cannot, as a practical matter, sustain.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, philosophical and Sufi discourses have pronounced loud and clear the fact that *extra-legal* or *supra-legal* *Truth* is built-in to the epistemology and logic of the spatiality of Divine Revelation. Simply, the different spaces of Revelation generate from their different sources by their different means their different truths to those of the law: thus, there are *meaningful spaces of Islamic existence beside the spaces of the law, both in thought and in practice*. The point is that this space of knowledge, truth, thought and action is conceived of as simultaneously *beside the law but within Islam*—which is why, as a social and historical fact, normative pluralism in societies of Muslims regularly asserts itself well beyond the parameters of the law and legal pluralism, and often without regard to the claim to authority of Islamic legal discourse as arbiter of the True.¹⁰¹ This attitude is usually characterized as “anti-nomianism”—I prefer the terms “para-nomian” and “supra-nominian” so as to emphasize that this stance does not necessarily place itself so much *against* the law as it does *beside, beyond* and *above* law.

⁹⁹ Legal pluralism obtains in the fact that, especially from the thirteenth century onwards, the four major Sunni legal schools have accepted, as a practical matter, the validity of each other's respective methodologies, opinions, and rulings even when those methodologies, opinions and rulings are different or diametrically opposed. These differing opinions are all regarded as the honest outcomes of sincere and systematically sound attempts to discern God's law in a particular case. A thoughtful essay is still Jean-Paul Charnay, “Pluralisme normatif et ambiguïté dans le fiqh,” *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963) 65–82.

¹⁰⁰ George Makdisi, “Freedom in Islamic Jurisprudence: *Ijtihad*, *Taqlid*, and Academic Freedom,” in George Makdisi, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine (editors), *The Concept of Freedom in the Middle Ages: Islam, Byzantium and the West*, Paris: Société d’Édition, 1985, 79–88, at 83.

¹⁰¹ We may remind ourselves of the lament of the jurist, Ibn ‘Aqil, cited in Chapter 1: “The Sufis turned the Law into a name!” Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbis Iblis*, 325.

The question to be asked here is whether developing the analytical habit of conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, of looking for Islamic norms in social and discursive *diffusion*, and of recognizing the presence in societies of Muslims of para-nomian and supra-nomian values, can help us to conceptualize Islamic law itself in a larger perspective of social and discursive truth, meaning and value. Or, to put it another way, how can cultivating the analytical habit of looking for Islamic norms in hermeneutical, social and discursive *diffusion*, and of recognizing the presence in societies of Muslims of para-nomian and supra-nomian values, help us *to conceptualize the law in terms beyond those of the law itself?*¹⁰²

The dominant tendency is still to conceive of Islamic law solely on the terms in which it is elaborated in the discourse of the *fuqahā'*-jurisprudents using the dominantly Textualist methodology of *uṣūl al-fiqh*-jurisprudence that proceeds from scriptural hermeneutics: in other words, that which makes Islamic law *Islamic* is understood squarely to be the claim of the *fuqahā'*-jurisprudents to have derived the law ultimately from the Text of Revelation. But, as we have seen—exemplarily in the *fatwā* of Ebū-s-Sü‘ūd on the Sufis who dive in the limitless ocean of the Real-Truth of God—*fuqahā'*-jurisprudents lived and thought and worked and wrote in societies of Muslims in which the protagonists of a variety of other discourses were constantly pitching their own normative claims to various registers and loci of truth and meaning back and forth across the social arena. The societies in which the discourse of *fiqh* was operative were also the societies in which the supra-nomian ideas of Avicennan and Suhrawardian philosophy, and of Akbarian Sufism were idiomatic; they were also the societies populated by the visible physical presence of those Sufis whom Ahmet Karamustafa has so memorably called “God’s Unruly Friends”¹⁰³ whose public behaviour—legitimated by the existential fact of their living engagement with and embodiment of the Truth of the Unseen (the Truth of the Pre-Text)—displayed utter disregard for the legal norms of the Seen (in the Indian subcontinent, these Sufis are colloquially called *bē-shara*‘, literally: “without law”).¹⁰⁴ The societies

¹⁰² I agree fully with this statement of Aziz al-Azmeh: “It is not through law that we may be able to understand Muslim historical experience, but rather the inverse; it is by the careful and objective historical scrutiny of those experiences that we may be able to interpret the law and examine the way in which it influenced, or failed to influence, or otherwise interacted with, practices and conceptions of pluralism. The world cannot be properly understood stood on its head,” al-Azmeh, “Pluralism in Muslim Societies,” 14.

¹⁰³ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ For a historical study in the Indian context, see Simon Digby, “Qalandars and Related

of *fiqh* were also societies in which the para-nomian practices of love-play and miniature painting and wine-drinking and music were valorized positively, were lived and were also celebrated in the most prolifically circulated literature of the day. A question that is hardly ever asked is: *how might this range of other Islamic norms have informed the ways in which Muslims conceived of the law, its constitution, its values and its ideal operation?* Might the conceptualization of law in societies of Muslims have been significantly informed and configured by considerations of value that were not constituted by *fugahā*-jurisprudents and emplotted by them in the methodological trajectory of *uṣūl al-fiqh* jurisprudence? *What might the effects be for our understanding if we were to conceptualize Islamic law not only in the strictly legal discourses of the jurists, but in the broader hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text in the social and discursive diffusion of Truth in societies of Muslims?*

I propose, for a start, that conceiving of Islamic law in this way—that is, putting Islamic law into Con-Text and, thus, into historical, social, intellectual, imaginal and normative perspective—can help us to overcome a conceptual impasse in regard to a very large and fundamental historical problem in the study of Islamic law at which we have arrived precisely as a result of the insistence on identifying Islamic law entirely with the law authored by the *fugahā*-jurisprudents. This is the question of how to *conceptualize* (rather than merely *describe*) the relationship between, on the one side, *shari‘ah*, or *fiqh*¹⁰⁵—that is, what is generally called Divine law, or religious law, or jurists’ law, being the law interpreted by Muslim scholars of the law, the *fugahā*-jurisprudents, from, in the first instance, the Textual sources of Qur’ān and Hadith, by analogical and dialectical reasoning and other methods—and, on the other side, *siyāsah* or *qānūn*, that is, “government law” or “ruler’s law”—that is, the law *made by rulers on their own authority* and routinely called by historians “secular state law as distinct from the *shari‘a*.¹⁰⁶

Groups: Elements of Social Deviance in the Religious Life of the Delhi Sultanate of the 13th and 14th Centuries,” in Yohanan Friedmann (editor), *Islam in Asia*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984, 1:60–108; for a contemporary study, see the chapters entitled “The Qalandar Confronts the Proper Muslim” and “The Qalandar as Trope” in Katherine P. Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam*, Durham: Durham University Press, 1997, at 201–292. For the concept and historical phenomenon of the *malāmī* Sufi—literally: “the Sufi of blame”—who behaves publicly in a manner that draws reproach from the protagonists of public legal norms, see the sadly untranslated classic work of Abdülbaki Golpınarlı, *Melāmilik ve Melāmililer*, İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931.

¹⁰⁵ Correctly speaking, *shari‘ah* is God’s law in the absolute or ideal sense of the Law as the Law with God and as it is known by God, whereas *fiqh* (literally, “understanding”) is the human understanding and identification of God’s Law.

¹⁰⁶ In a formulation that is representative of the field, the Ottoman legal historian, Richard

It has only recently begun to be recognized by historians that a great deal of the law that was historically produced and applied in societies of Muslims—especially (but not only) in the major domains of administrative law (including the laws that administer the legal system itself), land law, and criminal law—has, in fact, been “ruler’s law,” that is *siyāsah* or *qānūn*, rather than “jurists’ law” or *fiqh* or *shari‘ah*. A great deal of the law that was historically produced and applied in societies of Muslims was made by Sultans in their palaces rather than by *fugahā’* in their *madrasahs*. *Siyāsah* or *qānūn* law tended, historically, as a practical business, *not* to be made by *fugahā’* using the methodology of *uṣūl al-fiqh*-jurisprudence that proceeds from scriptural hermeneutics. Rather, the primary sources of ruler’s law have tended to be reason (individual or collective), ethical tradition and communal experience or custom (*‘urf*)—the latter two being understood, effectively, as manifestations of collective reason.¹⁰⁷ Thus, in an important treatment of the relationship between the ruler and the law, the fifteenth-century Ottoman historian, Tūrsūn Bēg, collapsed the three categories of ruler’s law, reason and custom (*‘urf*) into one when he spoke of law that is *not* revealed *via* a Prophet as “the product of pure reason for the ordering of the visible world . . . sultanic *siyāsat* and imperial *yasāğ* which in our usage is called *‘urf*.¹⁰⁸ The terms, *‘urf-i sultāni* (Sultanic custom) or *‘urf-i pādishāhi* (imperial custom) are standard expressions denoting ruler’s law,¹⁰⁹ while *yasāğ* is the (pagan) Turco-Mongol Great Yasa—the law instituted by Genghis Khan. We might be taken aback at Tūrsūn Bēg’s adducing of pagan custom alongside Sultanic *siyāset* as an example of ruler’s law made “of pure reason for the ordering of the visible world,” but we should not be. Ruler’s law regularly entailed the incorporation of non-Muslim custom: indeed, the Great Yasa was regarded by Muslim rulers of Turkic origins as an *exemplum* of ruler’s law. The way in which non-

Repp, in a classic article, defines the “Ottoman *qānūn* (kanun) . . . in its broadest sense the body of written secular state law as distinct from the *shari‘a* (şeriat).” Richard C. Repp, “Qānūn and Shari‘a in the Ottoman Context,” in Aziz al-Azmeh (editor), *Islamic Law: Social and Historical Contexts*, London: Routledge, 1988, 124–145, at 124.

¹⁰⁷ A clear and economical treatment of the place of custom in fiqh legal theory, is available in Gideon Libson, *Jewish and Islamic Law: A Comparative Study of Custom During the Geonic Period*, Cambridge: Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School, 2003, 68–79, where it is noted that the idea that custom is a source of law was taken to be endorsed by the Prophet’s saying: “Everything that Muslims regard as good is good in God’s eyes.” Custom is understood as a form of consensus, and thus to be covered by the Prophetic pronouncement: “My community will not agree upon an error.” The monograph as a whole contains several detailed examples of the legal operation of *‘urf*.

¹⁰⁸ Tūrsūn Beg, *Tārih-i Ebü-l-Feth* (edited by Mehmed ‘Arif), Istanbul: Ahmed İhsān, 1912, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, 169.

Muslim custom was incorporated and enacted as ruler's law is nicely illustrated by the example of the *Qānūn-nāmehs* issued by Ottoman Sultan Bāyezīd II in the late fifteenth century that codified the rules and regulations for mining in the Balkans—whence came the silver for the Ottoman imperial mints. As the Ottoman legal historian, Snjezana Buzov, points out: one of these Sultanic codifications is simply the Sultanic adoption of the existing professional codes of Christian Saxon miners, while another is “the adopted law of the Serbian king Stefan Dušan, who, similar to Ottoman sultans, adopted the bylaws of Saxon miners.”¹¹⁰ The ongoing adoption and adaptation by later Muslim rulers of existing local custom and its institutionalization as law under the aegis of the states that they ruled as “God's Shadow on Earth” parallels directly the phenomenon in the earliest period of Islam of the wholesale adoption by the conquering Arab Muslim Caliphs of a large body of pre-existing Byzantine and Sassanian imperial law and local custom as law under the Caliphal aegis—law that was “naturalized” as Islamic law. As the eminent historian ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dūrī straightforwardly observed in his classic study on early *Islamic Institutions* (*al-Nuzum al-islāmiyyah*) in regard to the foundational legislation of the second “Rightly-Guiding” Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 632–642) whose legislation is one of the sources of *sharī‘ah* law in the epistemology of *uṣūl al-fiqh*: “‘Umar took up the Sasanian and Byzantine systems of taxation and continued them with some necessary modifications.”¹¹¹ Thus, in continuing to make ruler's law down the centuries, later Muslim rulers were simply emulating their Rightly-Guided forbears. *Ruler's law is, then, primarily and in the first instance, reason and custom brought to bear in executive judgement of the needs of a local situation on the authority of the ruler.*

Now, in the prevailing conceptualizations of the modern field of the study of Islamic law, for law to be *Islamic* (rather than “secular state law”) it should be made by *fuqahā’*-jurisprudents using the methodology of *uṣūl al-fiqh* that proceeds from the hermeneutics of the Text of Revelation. Since ruler's law/*siyāsat/qānūn* is made from reason and custom rather than from scriptural hermeneutics, ruler's law is, in the conceptualization prevalent in modern scholarship, seen “as intruding into a pure, perfect sphere of Islamic law”—that is, as best as an unwelcome necessity, and at worst as an illegitimate in-

¹¹⁰ Snjezana Buzov, “The Lawgiver and His Lawmakers: Discourse in the Change of Ottoman Imperial Culture,” PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005, 120.

¹¹¹ *istafāda ‘Umar min al-anżimah al-sāsāniyyah wa al-bīzanṭiyyah fi al-darā‘ib wa abqā-hā ma‘a ba‘d al-ta‘dilāt al-darūriyyah*, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dūrī, *al-Nuzum al-islāmiyyah: al-khilāfah al-darā‘ib al-dawāwīn wa al-wizārah*, Baghdad: Wizārat al-Ma‘arif al-‘Irāqiyyah, 1950, 110. Also see Benjamin Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law: Harun-Al-Rashid's Codification Project*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007 (Jokisch's historical data is important even if one does not fully accept his interpretation of it).

terloper into “the ideal form of Islamic law” which is “independent from the state.”¹¹²

So, the question is, if ruler’s law/*siyāsat/qānūn* is not made by *fuqahā’* using the *uṣūl al-fiqh* methodology that proceeds from scriptural hermeneutics, then (how) is ruler’s law Islamic? If Muslims did regard ruler’s law as other than Islamic, then did they not exist in a reality where the legal framework of the polity that governed their lives (and quite possibly a significant bulk of the specific laws under which they lived) were not actually considered by them to be in accordance with the Truth and Value of the Divine? When we classify ruler’s law as “secular state law”—that is, something other than Islamic—are we accurately reflecting how Muslims conceptualized ruler’s law? Or did Muslims conceive of ruler’s law as part and parcel of *Islamic law*—and if so, how?

A growing body of scholarly literature has recently begun to recognize that, as a *practical matter*, ruler’s law and jurists’ law were (somehow) viewed by Muslims as an integrated functioning systemic entity. Thus the legal historian, Kristin Stilt, has argued for Mamlük Egypt and Syria that the functioning of the office of the *muhtasib*—the regulator of transactions and moral conduct in markets and other public spaces (and hence the single legal official with whom most members of society were most likely to come into contact)—was effected in what she calls a “*fiqh-siyāsah* framework.”¹¹³ Another Mamlük legal historian, Yossef Rapoport, has argued on the basis of Mamlük case-law that: “rulers intervened quite heavily in legislating, modifying and applying the *shari‘ah*.” Rapoport asserts in regard to the Mamlük state that, “The *siyāsah* of the state was . . . an integral and legitimate element of the *shari‘ah*,”¹¹⁴ and goes on to note the widely-recognized fact that “the Ottoman Empire, the one Islamic state for which we have abundant legal records, exemplifies synergy between the ruler’s law and Islamic law. The Ottoman *kanun* added to the religious law in matters relating to public order, taxation, usury, and land tenure. Yet, at the same time, the *kanun* was accepted as an integral part of the legal culture required by the *shari‘ah*; the two complemented each other.”¹¹⁵ Guy Burak has argued that the Ottoman state actively intervened in the legal

¹¹² For a critical diagnosis of this “dominant paradigm” of Islamic legal studies, see Yossef Rapoport, “Royal Justice and Religious Law: *Siyāsah* and *Shari‘ah* under the Mamluks,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 16 (2012) 71–102, at 71–74, the quotations are at 74.

¹¹³ Kristen Stilt, *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 208.

¹¹⁴ Rapoport, “Royal Justice and Religious Law,” 102.

¹¹⁵ Rapoport, “Royal Justice and Religious Law,” 74. On the state and the Ottoman legal system, see the invaluable works of Haim Gerber culminating in his afore-cited *Islamic Law and Culture*.

doctrine of the Ḥanafī school so as to participate in the making of a state *madhhab* of Hanafism: “The sultan . . . claimed authority to regulate the legal content that members of the imperial establishment were to apply . . . a specific version of the Ḥanafī school.”¹¹⁶ As Knut Vikør sums it up: “the Ottoman sultan ‘unified’ the law into a *kanun* that encompasses the *Shari‘a*.¹¹⁷ All this is to say that in different ways in different places at different times, Muslim rulers made, on their own authority, laws based primarily on reason and custom without regarding themselves as having stepped out of the bounds or violated the will of God’s Law. To the contrary: in the conceptualization of these Muslim rulers, they were making laws in accordance with God’s Law. And it appears that with this view *fuqahā*-jurisprudents participating in the functioning of the legal system by and large agreed:¹¹⁸ *siyāsah* and *qānūn* law was, in the well-documented Ottoman context, applied also by *qādīs*—who were *madrasah*-trained *fuqaha*-jurisprudents—in their courts.¹¹⁹

The Ottoman state presents us with a most instructive historical example. The Ottoman state administered justice in its vast domains by means of a *co-dependent* working relationship between what the Ottomans called *ṣerī‘at* (jurist-identified “Divine law”) and what they called *qānūn* (“Sultanic law”). The Ottoman state invested large amounts of state wealth in the education of *fuqahā* and in their salaryng as state officials of the judicial branch in a vast networks of courts and judges—and these *fuqahā*-jurisprudents, in their capacities as scholars and as judges, produced a large corpus of law texts in the form of books of legal theory, positive law, articles (*risālahs*) and *fatwas* (*legal rulings*). At the same time, Ottoman Sultans made large bodies of law through edicts—the Sultanic *qānūns*. Nor was it the case that *qānūn*-law was enacted only in domains where the Text had omitted directly to intervene. Rather, Sultanic legal intervention sometimes took the form of a ruler choosing between the different interpretations of *faqih*-jurisprudents—thereby effectively acting as jurist himself and laying down *legal policy* for judges to follow in court (such as when the Ottoman Sultan Süleymān “Qānūnī” [The Lawmaker]

¹¹⁶ Guy Burak, “The Abū Ḥanifah of His Time: Islamic Law, Jurisprudential Authority and Empire in the Ottoman Domains (16th-17th Centuries),” PhD dissertation, New York University, 2012, 21–22.

¹¹⁷ Knut S. Vikør, *Between God and Sultan: A History of Islamic Law*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 212.

¹¹⁸ Of course, there were *fuqahā* who did not agree.

¹¹⁹ In other times and places, ruler’s law was generally applied in separate *siyāsah*- or *mazālim*-courts in which judges were appointed who were state administrative-military officials, or in courts in which administrative-military officials and *fiqh*-trained *qādīs* sat side by side on the bench (the Sultan himself sometimes acted as a sort-of Court of Final Appeal, both as regards judgement or sentencing).

ruled that persons convicted of heresy, in accordance with the opinions of the ancient jurists of the Hanafi *madhab* and against the opinions of some more recent jurists of the same school, must be given the opportunity to repent), and on other occasions took the form of straightforward initiatives by the ruler to author law (such as when Süleymān, at the approach of his Şeyh-ül-Islām, the great jurist Ebū-s-Sü‘ūd, limited the legal rate of interest at 11.5 percent).¹²⁰

The above gives some sense of the reach and scope of ruler's law in the history of societies of Muslims. It is highly significant that probably the single action of most far-reaching consequence for legal doctrine in the history of Islam was not the act of a jurist or collection of jurists, but was a Sultanic initiative. This was the decision in 1265 of the Mamlük Sultan Baybars—who, by virtue of the perceived accomplishment of having saved what was left of the Muslim world by defeating the all-consuming Mongol armies at the Battle of ‘Ayn Jälüt, found himself in possession of extraordinary charismatic legitimacy and authority—to appoint Chief Judges from all four Sunni legal *madhhabs*. Baybars' Sultanic legal reform led rapidly, in interaction with other institutional changes, to the creation of a normative legal culture where the jurists of the four Sunni *madhhabs* of *fiqh* came to accept—as a matter of law—the validity of each other's respective legal rulings even when those rulings were in outright disagreement. The plural orthodoxy of jurists' law owes its historical institutionalization to the intervention of Sultanic law.¹²¹

Legal intervention on the part of the state in the form of legislation and application of *siyāsah* and *qānūn* was, in other words, historically regarded by Muslims as a part and parcel of the operation of Islamic law.¹²² But while these findings offer a *description* of the historical reality, it is still not clear as a *conceptual* matter how this is so: on what *conceptual* basis did Muslims conceive of a “*fiqh-siyāsah* framework” as a legitimate expression of God's law, or of Islamic law as comprising “*siyāsah* as a part of *shari‘ah*,” or of Islamic law where the sultan assumed the authority “to regulate the legal content” of a legal *madhab*? In the absence of such conceptual bases, the acceptance by Muslims of ruler's law emerges as a purely pragmatic stratagem without a normative basis in terms of Islam.

¹²⁰ I have both these examples from Gerber, *Islamic Law and Culture*, 62–63.

¹²¹ On the causes and legal effects of Baybars' move, see Rapoport, “Legal Diversity in the Age of *Taqlīd*.”

¹²² Certainly, it is high time that we abandon the old Orientalist nostrums exemplified in the following statement of Bernard Lewis: “Islam admitted no legislative power since law could emanate only from God through revelation, but customary law and civil legislation, the will of the ruler, survived unofficially with occasional limited recognition from the jurists,” Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, New York: Harper and Row, 1960, 134.

We will not readily find the answer to this fundamental legal question in the texts to which we usually resort as *normative* in the matter of Islamic law: namely, the jurisprudential discourse of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. But if we are prepared to seek Islamic norms elsewhere—that is, in intellectual and discursive and social *diffusion*—we *will* find the answer to this fundamental legal question readily enough in a *non-legal* genre: namely, the philosophically-inflected discourse of *akhlāq*-ethics. It is under the conceptual canopy of *akhlāq*-ethics that Muslims have tended historically most to discuss political theory—that is, the subject of how Muslims should govern their collective affairs in a polity. The seminal work in this genre for the Balkans-to-Bengal complex was the aforementioned book of Nāṣir-ud-Dīn Ṭūsī, the *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī*, which, over the course of the half-millennium after its author’s death, was—as we shall see—routinely invoked, paraphrased, and elaborated upon in discussions of the relation of the ruler to law-making.

Since Ṭūsī’s treatment of this subject was, as he said himself, derived largely from the writings on political theory of the “Second Philosopher,” al-Fārābī (the “First Philosopher” being Aristotle),¹²³ we had as well begin with al-Fārābī’s writing, in tenth-century Baghdad, of the book that is not always given its due as the foundational work of political theory in the history of societies of Muslims—*The Principles of the Views of the People of the Excellent City* (*Mabādi’ ārā ahl al-madīnah al-fādilah*). The first sovereign of the *Excellent City*, says al-Fārābī, is a “Prophet [*nabi*]” who is “a sage [*ḥakim*]” and a “philosopher [*faylasūf*]” and an “exemplar [*Imām*]” to whom “God, the Exalted, the Glorious, communicates through the medium of the Active Intellect.”¹²⁴ Such men do not come along in every generation (and eventually the line of Prophets ceases altogether); but “the laws and customs legislated by this Sovereign will be adopted” for future generations.¹²⁵ As far as *subsequent* sovereigns are concerned, al-Fārābī lays out for them six qualifications:

The sovereign will . . . after his adulthood possess six qualities. First: he will be a philosopher [*ḥakim*]. Second: He will be learned and versed in the laws [*al-sharā’i*] and normative practices [*al-sunan*] and modes of conduct [*al-siyar*] that the first ones have set forth [*dabbara*] for the city,

¹²³ Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī*, 248; Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 186.

¹²⁴ Allāh ‘azza wa jalla yūhī ilay-hi bi-tawassuṭ al-‘aql al-fa‘āl, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State* (*Mabādi’ ārā ahl al-madīnat al-fādilah*) (edited and translated by Richard Walzer), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, 244 (compare Walzer’s translation at 245).

¹²⁵ ukhidhat al-sharā’i‘ wa al-sunan allati sharrā‘a-hā hādhā al-ra‘is, al-Fārābī, *Mabādi’ ārā ahl al-madīnat al-fādilah*, 250 (compare Walzer’s translation at 251).

and will measure and pattern all his actions fully according to their example [*mutahadhdhiyan bi-af‘ali-hi kulli-hā ḥadhwa tilka bi-tamāmi-hā*]. Third: He will excel at deducing [*istinbāt*] (new law) in regard to that where no law [*shari‘ah*] has been preserved from the first predecessors [*salaf*]—and will follow in his deduction the example of the first Imāms. Fourth: He will have excellent perception and capacity to deduce (new law) in such conditions and circumstances that arise at a particular instance in the present time for which the first ones had no way [*sabil*] to put down norms [*yasunnu*]—and will, in deducing (new law), look to the good of the city [*salāḥ ḥāl al-madīnah*]. Fifth: He will excel in guiding (people), by discourse, to the laws [*sharā‘i‘*] of the first ones, and to that which he has deduced after them while following their example. Sixth: He will possess physical strength to undertake the works of warfare, and will know the primary and secondary crafts of warfare . . . when these six qualities exist separately in different men, they should all together be the excellent sovereigns.¹²⁶

What I should like to draw attention to here is that al-Fārābī places great emphasis on the crucial—indeed, definitive—function of the ruler in relation to the law: it is the ruler who upholds the foundational laws and customs of the polity received from the first (divinely-inspired) sovereign(s), and who makes new laws upon the principles (*ḥadhwa*: “measure,” “pattern,” “example”) of those foundational laws and customs. The ruler’s capacity to do this obtains from the fact that he is, on the one hand, a philosopher (*hakīm*), and that he is further, and on the other hand, well-versed in the laws of the city. He also has the capacity to “guide people to the law by discourse.” It is noteworthy that if there is no one man competent to this task, al-Fārābī allows that the office of ruler be executed by a collective that together fulfills the requisite qualities of the ruler.

Three hundred years later Naṣīr-ud-Dīn Ṭūsī, who (as we have noted) initially wrote his *Ethics* for an Ismā‘īlī patron, but eventually completed it at the court of and dedicated it to the pagan world-conquering Mongol Hülegü Khān, took up the question of the relationship between the ruler and the law in his chapter on “Civilization” [*tamaddun*].

That which is meant here by “city” is not the dwellings of the inhabitants of a city, but a particular association between the inhabitants of a city.

¹²⁶ Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Mabādi’ ārā ahl al-madīnat al-fādilah*, 250 and 252 (compare Walzer’s translation of al-Fārābī’s famously idiosyncratic Arabic at 251 and 253).

This is what the Philosophers mean when they say that the human being is *civic* [*madani*] by nature; that is, they are, by nature, in need of that association that we call “civilization” . . . If left to their own devices, no co-operation can conceivably result among them, for the domineering man will make everyone his slave, while the greedy will desire for himself all things that are acquired, and when strife befalls them, they will concern themselves only with destruction and injustice. Wheretofore there must necessarily be some *management* [*tadbîr*] by which each person is made content with the rights of the station which he deserves, and to bring him to his due, and to restrain the hand of each from infringement and interference in the rights of others . . . Such a management [*tadbîr*] is called Government [*siyâsat*] . . .

In government [*siyâsat*], there is need of a Law [*nâmûs*], a Ruler [*hâkim*], and a currency. If that management [*tadbîr*] is in accord with the requisite [*vujûb*] and the principle [*qâ'idah*] of Wisdom [*hikmat*] leading to the perfection which is potential in all species and individuals, it is called Divine Government [*siyâsat-i ilâhi*]. And if not, it is attributed to whatever other thing is the source of that government.

. . . Some government is attached to things-that-are-laid-down [*awzâ'*], as is the case in contracts and transactions, while other government is attached to rational judgements [*ahkâm-i 'aqlî*] as is the case with managing the kingdom or organizing the city.

. . . In determining layings-down [*taqdîr-i awzâ'*] a person is needed who is distinguished from others by Divine Inspiration in order that they follow him. Such a person in the expression of the Ancients is called the “Possessor of the Law” [*şâhib-i nâmûs*] and his layings-down [*awzâ'*] are called the Divine Law [*nâmûs-i ilâhi*], while in the expression of the moderns he is called *shari'ah*-maker [*shâri'*] and his layings-down [*awzâ'*] are called *shari'at* . . .

In determining (rational) judgements [*taqdîr-i ahkâm*], a person is needed who is distinguished from others by Divine support [*ta'yîd-i yiilâhi*] in order that he be able to perfect other people. Such a person, in the expression of the Ancients was called “The King-Absolute” [*malik 'alâ al-itlâq*] and his rulings were called “state-craft” [*sinâ'at-i mulk*], while the moderns call him “Exemplar [*Imâm*]” and call his action *imâmat*. Plato called him “The Manager of the World” [*mudabbir-i 'âlam*], while Aristotle called that person “The Civic Man” [*insân-i madani*], meaning “that man and his like by whose existence civilization [*tamâd-dun*] is formed.”

A “Possessor of the Law” [*sāhib-i nāmūs*] is not needed in every age and every generation, for one Laying-Down [*vaż’*] suffices for the people of many cycles of time. However, a Manager [*mudabbir*] is required in the world in every age, for if management is terminated, order is dissipated, and the remaining people are unable to continue in the most perfect way. The Manager [*mudabbir*] undertakes to preserve the Law [*hifz-i nāmūs*] and charges men to uphold its prescriptions [*marāsim*]. He has deputed discretionary authority to determine the specifics according to what is needed for welfare in each time and circumstance [*va ū rā vilāyat-i taşarruf buvad dar juzviyyāt bar hasab-i maşlahat-i har vaqt va rüzgār*].¹²⁷

. . . The people of the Virtuous City, although they are different from one part of the world to another, are in reality in concord . . . in their close-knit affection, they are like a single individual. As the *shari‘ah*-giver says: “Muslims are a single hand against all others, and are as one soul.” Their rulers, who are the managers of the world, have authority of dispensation [*taşarruf*] regarding Laid-Down Laws [*avżā‘-i nawāmīs*] and regarding welfare [*maşāliḥ*] in daily living—an authority to dispense according to what is congenial and appropriate to the time and conditions. In regard to Laid-Down Laws, the authority of dispensation is specificatory [*juzvi*]; in regard to welfare, the authority of dispensation is total [*kullī*]. This is the reason that *dīn* and rulership hang on each other: as the Persian Emperor and philosopher, Ardeshir, said: “*Dīn* and rulership are twins: neither is complete without the other. *Dīn* is the foundation, and rulership is the pillars: a foundation without pillars is wasted, and pillars without foundation are ruined; *dīn* without rulership is of no benefit, and rulership without *dīn* is fatuous . . .”

The authority of dispensation that a successor has, in accordance with welfare [*maşlahat*], over the rulings of his predecessors is not in contradiction to the latter, but rather is the perfecting [*takmil*] of the law [*qānūn*] of the latter. It is tantamount to the successor having lived in that earlier time: he would have issued that same law; or if the predecessor were to live in the present time, he would institute this same law—for the way of Reason is one. The confirmation of this thesis is that which is

¹²⁷ Tūsī, *Akhlaq-i Naṣīri*, 252–254 (compare the translation of Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 191–192; and of Wilferd Madelung, “Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī’s Ethics between Philosophy, Shi‘ism and Sufism,” in Richard G. Hovannisian (editor), *Ethics in Islam*, Malibu: Undena Publications, 1985, 85–101, at 95–96.

reported from ‘Isā—peace be upon him—who said: “I have not come to nullify the Torah but to perfect it.”¹²⁸

From this it is evident that Politics [*hikmat-i madanī*; literally: “civic wisdom” or “civic philosophy”] . . . is the study of universal laws [*qavānīn-i kullī*] resulting in the welfare [*maṣlahat*] of the generality inasmuch as they are directed, through co-operation, to Real-True perfection.

. . . And in the same way that the master of the science of medicine, by his being an expert at his craft, becomes able to preserve the health of the body of the human being and to remove illness from it; so is the master of this science, by his being skilled in his craft, become able to preserve the health of the constitution of the world—which is called “Real-True Equilibrium” [*i‘tidāl-i haqīqī*]—and to remove therefrom any imbalance.

Truly, he is the physician of the world.¹²⁹

Government [*siyāsat*], as Ṭūsī makes clear, is about *management* [*tadbīr*]. The function of that management is to bring about a state of affairs where each person obtains and is content with his rights—that is to say, a state of *justice*. If that government/management is in accord with Wisdom/*hikmat* it is called Divine Government; that is, the Divine *is* Wisdom/*hikmat*. Government/management in accordance with the Divine Wisdom produces the perfect state.

As regards Law, this Divine Wisdom is available through Divine Inspiration which delivers the “layings-down” of the Divine Law, which the ancient philosophers called the *nāmūs* (Greek: *nomos*) and which “moderns” call the *shari‘ah*. In each and every place and time, a government/management/ruler is needed to ensure that people live in accordance with the “layings-down” of *nāmūs/shari‘ah/hikmat*. In order to ensure that people live in accordance with Divine Law, the government/management/ruler has *vilāyat-i taṣarruf*—literally: the authority to use or dispose of a thing according to one’s judgement. In regard to the laid-down Divine Law, this is the dispensation to *specify* and *particularize* that law “according to what is needed for welfare [*maslahat*] in each time and circumstance.” In other matters, the ruler has absolute authority to make original law with a view to general welfare. In both of these exercises of ruler’s discretionary authority—which are the exercise of civic wisdom—all laws must be in “in accordance with the general or universal laws [*qavānīn-i kullī*] whose application in every time and place produces welfare

¹²⁸ Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī*, 285 (compare the translation of Wickens: Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 215; and by Madelung, “Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s Ethics,” at 96).

¹²⁹ Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī*, 254–255 (compare the translation of Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 192–193).

[*maṣlahat*.]” If what we have here is not quite a circle, it does very much resemble two mirrored and intersecting arcs. In the one arc, the specification of laid-down Divine law must be made by the exercise of reason to identify welfare. In the other arc, the means to welfare is to be identified by rational examination of general or universal laws—that is, principles of law that demonstrably produce welfare. In other words, what both Divine law and ruler’s law have in common is that they are both expressions of universal reason that issue in general welfare. Both ruler’s law and Divine law are doing the same thing: they are making specific law in accordance with the universal laws that produce welfare—just as a physician identifies the universal laws that govern health, and makes specific prescriptions in accordance with them.

The above al-Fārābi-derived passage in the *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī* became the seminal basis of subsequent discussions of the relationship between the ruler and law in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. Two centuries after Ṭūsi, the philosopher Jalāl-ud-Dīn Davvānī (1422–1506), prepared his book of ethics and political theory, the *Akhlaq-i Jalālī*, at the behest of the Aq-Quyunlu Sultan Üzün-Hasan (1423–1478), a Sunnī Ḥanafī ethnic Turcoman who ruled over much of present-day Iran, Iraq, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Syria. The *Akhlaq-i Jalālī* which, as we noted, was destined to become a best-seller read both by the Mughal and Ottoman ruling elite, is a re-visioning of the *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī* in which Davvānī edits, re-arranges, summarizes, and adds to Ṭūsi’s text.

The philosophers have said that the human being is *civic* [*madani*] by nature; that is, they, by nature, need to associate in that particular association that we call “civilization” . . . Each being accustomed to pursuing his own interest, were they left to their own devices . . . each would, in pursuing his own interest, harm the other and there would be violence and disorder. Wheretofore there must be some *management* [*tadbīr*] by which each person is made content with his rights, and which restrains the hand from infringement upon the rights of another. This management is called the “Greatest Government” [*sīyāsat-i ‘uzmā*].

In this matter (as has been mentioned in the chapter on Justice) there is need of a Law [*nāmūs*], a Ruler [*ḥākim*], and a currency. As for the Law [*nāmūs*], its Possessor is that person who is distinguished from others by Divine Inspiration and Communication to establish stipulations of worship and the rules of transactions [*aḥkām al-mu‘āmalāt*] that lead to good [*ṣalāḥ*] in this life and in the hereafter. The philosophers call this person the “Possessor of the Law” [*ṣāḥib-i nāmūs*] and call his rulings

“Law” [*nāmūs*], while in the custom of the moderns he is called “Prophet” [*nabi*] and *shari‘ah*-maker [*shāri‘*] and his rulings are called *shari‘at* . . .

As for the “Ruler” [*hākim*], he is the person who is distinguished by Divine support such that he is able to perfect individual human beings and to order their collective welfare [*maṣāliḥ*]. The philosophers call this person “The King-Categorical” [*malik ‘alā al-iṭlāq*] and they call his rulings “state-craft” [*šinā‘at-i mulk*], while the moderns call him *Imām* and call his action *imāmat*. Plato called him “The Manager of the World” [*mudabbir-i ‘ālam*], while Aristotle called that person “The Civic Man” [*insān-i madani*], meaning “that man who brings the affairs of the city to an appropriate form.”

. . . At all times, the World-Manager should, first and foremost, uphold the value-rulings of the *shari‘at* [*aḥkām-i shari‘at*]. He has discretionary authority in the specificities of matters according to what is needed for welfare in a given time in such form as accords with the universal principles of the *shari‘at* [*va ū rā ikhtiyār-i taṣarruf dar juzvīyyāt-i umūr bāshad bi-ḥasb-i maṣlaḥat-i vaqt bar vajhī kih muwāfiq-i qavā‘id-i kullīyah-i shari‘at bāshad*]. Such a person is indeed the “Shadow of God” and “The Caliph of God” and the “Deputy of the Prophet.”

Just as an expert physician [*tabib*] maintains the balance of the human temperament, this person must keep watch over the health of the temper of the world—which is called “Real-True Equilibrium” [*i‘tidāl-i ḥaqīqī*]—such that when it deviates from this path, he must return it to the balance. Then he will *really* be the Physician of the World.¹³⁰

Davvānī’s presentation of the sound functioning of the civilized polity thus also places great emphasis on the pivotal role of the “Ruler”—whether he be called “King” or “Imam” or “World-Manager” or “civic man”—in the formulation of specific laws for the maintenance of human welfare. Davvānī informs the Sultan Üzün-Hasan that the Sultan’s definitive function is to create a social condition where “each person is made content with his rights, and which restrains the hand from infringement upon the rights of another”—that is to create the conditions of *justice*. This responsibility of the Sultan is so momentous that it is to be regarded as nothing less than the “Greatest Government [*siyāsat-i ‘uzmā*]”. In order to carry out this office, the Sultan

¹³⁰ Davvānī, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, 221–223 (compare Thompson’s translation, *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People*, 322–326). The above passage has been studied by E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958, 214–217.

Ūzūn-Hasan must “uphold the legal-value-rulings [*aḥkām*] of the *shari‘at*,”¹³¹ which are generally understood in the juridical literature to be the legal-value that is attributed to an act by Divine Communication: that is, whether an act is obligatory, permitted or prohibited.¹³² What is meant by the ruler’s function of upholding the “*aḥkām* of the *shari‘at*” is clarified in the statement that follows immediately: “The ruler has discretionary authority in the specificities of matters according to what is needed for welfare in a given time in such form as accords with the universal principles of the *shari‘at*.” Davvānī here makes a significant addition to Tūsi’s formulation¹³³ by adding the need for ruler’s law to conform to the “universal principles of the *shari‘at*.” These “universal” (*kulliyāt*) or “necessary” (*darūriyāt*) principles of the *shari‘ah* are, beginning from at least in the thirteenth century, consistently identified in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature as the five universal and necessary values of human society: the preservation of *dīn* (man’s obligations to God), life (*nafs*), intellect (*‘aql*), family or lineage (*nasl*), property (*māl*). Honour (*‘ird*) is sometimes annexed to *dīn* or to *nasl*, and sometimes added as a separate value. (And since *dīn* includes the obligations owed by man to God, we might say that the ruler’s responsibility to uphold the *aḥkām* of the *shari‘ah* falls under the portfolio of preserving *dīn*). These universal principles of the *shari‘ah* are also commonly identified as the Purposes of the *Shari‘ah* (*maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*).¹³⁴ Which is to say that the ruler’s great *siyāsat* consists in his upholding of *shari‘at* precisely by his enacting such specific laws (*juzviyyāt*) as are needed for the welfare of men in given temporal circumstances on condition that these laws preserve *dīn*, life, intellect, family, property, and honour. It is the fulfillment of this law-making function that renders the ruler “Shadow of God,” “Caliph of God,” and “Deputy of the Prophet.” And it is worth noting as a matter of historical fact that

¹³¹ Tūsi says, “The Manager [*mudabbir*] undertakes to preserve the Law [*nāmūs*] and obliges men to uphold its prescriptions [*marāsim*].”

¹³² “The *ulema* of *uṣūl* define *hukm sharī‘i* as a locution or communication from the Lawgiver concerning the conduct of the *mukallaf* person (a person in full possession of his faculties) which consists of a demand, an option, or an enactment,” Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991, 321.

¹³³ In Tūsi’s *Akhlaq*, the equivalent sentence reads: “He has deputed sovereign authority of determination in regard to specificities according to what is needed for welfare in each time and age.”

¹³⁴ See Ahmad al-Rasyuni, *Imam al-Shatibi’s Theory of the the Higher Objectives and Intents of Islamic Law*, London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005, 22–37; Felicitas Opwis, *Maslahā and the Purposes of the Law: Islamic Discourse on Legal Change from the 4th/10th to the 8th/14th Century*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010, 67, 157–159; and Muhammad Hashim Kamali, “*Maqāṣid al-Shari‘ah*: The Objectives of Islamic Law,” *Islamic Studies* 38 (1999) 193–208.

Davvānī's patron, Sultan Ězūn-Hasan, did indeed issue a number of *siyāsat* laws, some called *qānūn-nāmehs* and some called, in the Turco-Mongol custom, *yasāğ-nāmehs*.¹³⁵

Two things are clear in Davvānī's passage. First: the law-making function of the Sultan—what we might call the legal brief of God's Shadow, God's Caliph, and Deputy of the Prophet—is as broad and extensive as could be conceived. Certainly, the Sultan's law-making function loses nothing in comparison to that which students of Islamic law are accustomed to assign to the *fuqahā'*-jurisprudents. Indeed, in one sense the Sultan's legal function is effectively the same as that of the *fuqahā'*-jurisprudents: it is to make specific law in accordance with the principles of the *sharī'ah*. The difference here is the criteria and considerations that underpin and inform the Sultan's law-making projects: the Sultan's defining consideration is to "to perfect individual human beings and to order their collective welfare." The Sultan is, in other words, less concerned with the letter of the received law (which, the implication is, may or may not meet the needs of the welfare of society in the given time and circumstance) than he is with effecting the purpose of the law, which is precisely to meet the needs the welfare of society in the given time and circumstance.

Thus, and second: the ultimate *empirical test* of the success of the ruler's *siyāsat* is the *maṣlahat*-welfare of the community. In the same way that the ultimate *empirical* test of the success of a physician who diagnoses and devises and prescribes cures for the maladies of the patient is the observable health and welfare of his patient (Davvānī takes the comparison with the Physician from Tūsī who in turn has it from al-Fārābī), so the presumption here is that *maṣlahat*, like the health of the body, is something empirically knowable—that is, knowable through observation and reason. Natural science and political science operate in the same economy of identifying and applying the universal truths of the working of the world. This drawing of a parallel between the sound diagnosis and application of *maṣlahat* by the ruler in his divinely-appointed law-making function, and the sound diagnosis and application of medicine by a physician is, perhaps, a particularly effective illustration of the existence of the idea of direct and self-validating access to domains of truth of the Pre-Text. In the foregoing, I stressed how concomitant with the notion that the Text is only a partial and limited expression of the knowable Truth of the Pre-Text is the further notion that the Truth of the

¹³⁵ For the major *qānūnnāmah* of Sultan Ězūn-Hasan, which dealt with the matter of land taxation (crucial to public welfare), see V. Minorsky, "The Aq-Qoyunlu and Land Reforms," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 17 (1955) 449–462, at 449–450; see also Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, 82–83.

Pre-Text finds expression in the world and cosmos beyond the Text. In these locations the Truth may, *via* such means as are consonant with it—whether the reason of the philosophers, or the existential experience of the Sufis—be found, apprehended, known, and communicatively expressed. In this logic, since these truths in the world-and-cosmos-beyond-the-Text are the self-same Truth of Pre-Text, to know, experience and assimilate them is to bring oneself into *consonance* and *harmony* with the Truth of the Pre-Text, and thus to achieve *well-being* and *felicity*—the goal of both the philosophers and the Sufis. Political science and natural science operate by the same logic, and in the same matrix of Truth. The ruler's correct identification of the universal truth of the Pre-Text, and his correct formulation of its application in a specific time and circumstance, brings society-at-large into consonance and harmony with the universal truth of the Pre-Text—and thus achieves the welfare and felicity of the polity.

The ruler's *siyāsat*, then, is precisely the responsibility of making specific laws in accordance with the general principles of the *shari'at* by observation and reason of what is necessary for the goal of human welfare in the context of the needs of the time and place. Now, laws made in consonance with and for the fulfillment of the universal principles of the *shari'at* are expressions and specifications of *shari'at*: as such, it is difficult to conceive of the ruler's *siyāsat* as anything other than an expression of *shari'at*. And since the *test* of *siyāsat as shari'at* is *maṣlahat* (i.e., if the *siyāsat* delivers *māslahat* then it is self-evidently in accordance with health-giving *shari'at*), the reverse also applies: whenever a ruling entails *maṣlahat*, it is commensurate with God's intentions. Certainly, this was the logic of two of the *fuqahā'*-jurisprudents who most strongly advocated *maṣlahah* as a source of jurist's law: "al-Ṭūfī and al-Shāṭibī both argued that a causal relationship exists between the *ratio legis* and its ruling. Since the purpose of the law is certain to be *maṣlahah*, the reason for laying down any individual ruling, i.e. its *ratio legis*, certainly has to be a *maṣlahah*, too."¹³⁶ The office of ruler is, by definition, a law-making office: making law is part-and-parcel of *state-craft* which aims "to perfect individual human beings and to order their collective welfare."¹³⁷ And *maṣlahat* is the proof of the *siyāsat-shari'at* pudding.

¹³⁶ Opwis, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purposes of the Law*, 346.

¹³⁷ As Jan-Peter Hartung puts it, "The crux of the complex issue of legitimate, that is, just, political rule in pre- and early modern Muslim societies, appears to be the entanglement of the ethical and legal concepts of *maqāṣid al-shari'a* and *maṣlahah*, with the political order of *khilāfa*," Jans-Peter Hartung, "Enacting the Rule of Islam: On courtly patronage of religious scholars in pre- and early modern times," in Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartnburg (editors), *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, London: Routledge, 2011, 295–325, 314.

If the consistent discursive re-iteration of a principle in its salient discursive place in a society is any measure of the normativity of that principle, it is safe to say that this concept of the relationship between the ruler and the law was a standard and operative one in the way that Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex conceived of the state: it was a *normative Islamic concept*. Thus we find that one hundred and fifty years after Davvānī, and four hundred years after Tūsī, Muhsin Fānī Kashmīrī (d. 1671) authored at the court of the Mughal Emperor Awrangzēb (*regnant* 1658–1707) another Tūsī-based book of ethics and political theory, which would become known as the *Akhlāq-i Muhsinī*:

There is no need for a “Possessor of the Law” [*sāhib-i nāmūs*] or *sharī‘ah*-giver [*shāri‘*] in every age . . . however, what is necessary in every age is an Imām who is the manager of humankind and the sustainer of the elite and of the commons [*khāṣṣ va ‘āmm*] . . . It is the responsibility and task of the Imām, who is the Manager of all humankind, that he undertake to preserve the law [*nāmūs*]—which is to preserve the noble *sharī‘at* and order the people to uphold its prescriptions [*marāsim*] . . . He has the deputed sovereign authority [*vilāyat*] to determine the specificities of the law [*juz’iyyāt-i nāmūs*] according to the needs for welfare in a given time [*bih hasb-i maṣlahat-i vaqt*] in such a form as does not negate [*munāfi‘*] any universal *sharī‘at* principle [*qā‘idah-i kulliyah-i sharī‘yah*]. So, such a person is truly the Caliph of God and the Deputy of His Presence, the Custodian of the Message.¹³⁸

Like Davvānī, Muhsin Fānī Kashmīrī collapses the categories of Imām—an office that the modern analyst would likely categorize as “religious”—and Manager (*mudabbir*), an office that the modern analyst would likely categorize as “secular.” He emphasizes that the responsibility of the Imam-Manager is, on the one hand, to “preserve the noble *sharī‘at* and order the people to uphold its prescriptions,” and on the other, “to determine the specificities of the law according to the needs for welfare in a given time in such a form as does not negate any universal *sharī‘at* principle.” In saying that the form of

¹³⁸ *va hamah vaqt bih vujūd-i ṣāḥib-i nāmūs va shāri‘ hājat nayuftad . . . ammā dar har ‘ahd vujūd-i imām kih mudabbir-i anām va murabbī-yi khāṣṣ va ‘āmm ast žarūrī ast . . . va bar zimmat-i himmat-i imām kih mudabbir-i kāffah-i anām ast lāzim va vājib ast kih bih hifz-i nāmūs kih siyānat-i sharī‘-i sharīf ast qiyām numāyad va mardum rā nīz bih iqāmat-i marāsim-i ān amr farmāyad va ū rā vilāyat-i taṣarruf-i juz’iyyāt-i nāmūs ast bih hasb-i maṣlahat-i vaqt bar vajhi kih munāfi‘-yi qā‘idah-i kulliyah-i sharī‘yah nabāshad chih in chunīn shakhs dar haqīqat khalifat-Allāh va nāyib-i hażrat-i risālat panāh ast, Muhsin Fānī-yi Kashmīrī, *Akhlāq-i ‘Ālam-ārā: Akhlāq-i Muhsinī* (edited by Kh. Jāvēdī), Islamabad: Markaz-i Taḥqīqāt-i Fārsī-i Īrān va Pākistān, 1983, 162–163.*

the ruler's law must "not *negate* any universal *shari'at* principle" (*dīn*, life, property, intellect, lineage, honour), Muhsin Fānī Kashmīrī seems to give the Ruler an even wider berth in making new laws than does Davvānī who said the ruler's law must "*accord with* the universal principles of the *shari'at*"—since a law that pushes the boundaries of a *shari'at* principle might more easily be seen to be *not according with* the principle than to be actively *negating* the principle.

At the other end of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, in Istanbul, a century after Davvānī, the Military Judge (*Qāzī'asker*) of Rumelia (effectively, the Chief Justice of the Ottoman Empire), Qınālızādeh 'Ali Efendi (1510–1572), authored an extensive re-visioning of the *Akhlaq-i Nāṣirī* and the *Akhlaq-i Jalālī* in Ottoman Turkish. Qınālızādeh's book, the *Aḥlāq-i 'Alā'i*, rapidly became the most widely-read work of ethics and political theory in the Ottoman language. Here, the learned Chief Justice elaborates on Davvānī's position:

As for the Ruler [*hākim-i māni'*], he is the one who is distinguished by Divine support and upon whom is bestowed unending Divine accord [*tevfiq*] such that he is able to order the welfare [*şalāh*] of the domain and also to perfect the souls of the people [*'ibād*]. The philosophers [*hukemā'*] call this person the Ruler-Categorical [*hākim 'alā al-itlāq*] and call his rulings [*ahkām*] "the craft of kingship" [*sīnā'at al-mulk*]. The moderns call him "Caliph" and call his practice "Caliphate," while the party of the Shī'a call him "Imām" and call his practice "Imāmate." Plato called him the "Manager of the World" [*müdebbir-i 'ālem*], and Aristotle called him "The Civic Man"—that is, that man who is of aspect best suited to watch over the city.

Whereas the reins of the order of the world [*nizām-i 'ālem*] and the welfare [*şalāh*] of the workshop of the sons of Adam are deputed [*mevkūl*] to the sufficient hand of this possessor of fortunate-state [*sāhib-i devlet*], and are entrusted to [*mufavvaż*] his management [*tedbīr*] and to his government [*siyāset*]: felicity and happiness encompass the conditions of the tribute-paying and the free [*re'āyā vu berāya*], alike, and deficient and debased souls attain, from the depths of their deficiency and the winds of their misguidedness, to the summit of perfection and to the honour of nearness to the Exalted King [i.e., God].

... But if the manager of the world and possessor of the greatest *siyāset* be not this type of virtuous ruler, the face of the age is rendered void of the adornment of justice and equity [*'adālet vu insāf*] and the corners of the built-up world will not be free from the cries of the oppressed and the laments of those seeking justice.

... A *shari‘ah*-giver [*vāži‘-i şerī‘at*] is not necessary in every age; rather, what is necessary is a ruler [*ḥākim*] who causes the *shari‘ah* to work [*i‘māl*] and to run [*icrā*], and who, when there is no explicit *dictum* by the *shari‘ah*-giver in regard to specific matters, must deduce [*istihrāc*] and bring forth [*ibdā*] and make apparent [*izhār*] from the universal principles [*qavā‘id-i külliyyeh*]. The modern ‘ulemā’ call this capacity *ijtihād*—which is a necessary condition for whoever is the true Caliph.¹³⁹

... What people call “The Shadow of God” and “The Caliph of God” is this possessor of the fortunate-state [*şāhib-i devlet*]. And since a shadow conforms to the Possessor of the shadow, and corresponds with Him in all portion and proportion [*riyāset u maqādir*], the one who has *formal* dispensation [*müteşşerif-i şūrī*] over the world must correspond to the One who has Real-True Dispensation [*müteşşerif-i haqiqī*] and the One Who is the Possessor Absolute, spreading justice and goodness and overflowing bounty and charity, and being free and pure from [*muqad̄es*] oppressing the people and from causing injustice [*zulm*] in the country. He should display overflowing generosity to those people who possess due merit [*istihqāq*] and qualification [*isti‘dād*] with a view to their being free (to the extent that human nature allows) when spreading benefit and gain, from personal agenda [*ağrāz*] and from demanding compensation.

In sum . . . this person is perfect [*kāmil*] among his kind; and, applying the import of “Make yourself in accordance with the traits of God [*takhallaqū bi-akhlāq Allāh*],” is fit to be called Shadow of God on Earth, and merits possession of and distinction by the quality of the Caliphate of Real-Truth [*hilāfat-i haqiqat*].

This ruler is the physician of the temper of the world who, if the equilibrium of the order of the world is present, preserves it, and if it has been lost, restores it; just as the physician of the humor of a person, if the equilibrium of the person—in which his health consists—is present, preserves it, and if it is lost, restores it.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ pes her ‘asrdah vāži‘-i şerī‘at ölmak lâzım değil ammā ḥākim kih şerī‘atı i‘māl u icrā ve mevâdd-i cuz’îyyedeh naşş-i şāri‘ yoğiseh qavā‘id-i külliyehsinden istihrāc u izhār u ibdā eyleyeh lâzımdir ve bû quđretteh ‘ulemâ-yi muta’ehhirîn ictihâd derler kih *halîfah-i ber-haqq* olân kımesneñeh şarttır.

¹⁴⁰ Qinâlîzâdeh ‘Ali, *Ahlâq-i Alâî* (edited by ‘Abd al-Wahhâb Tâghistâni), Cairo: Maṭba‘at Bûlâq (upon the order of Muhammâd ‘Ali Pâshâ), 1248h [1832], 2:75–76. The fact that the *Ahlâq-i Alâî* was published at the order of the ruler of Egypt within ten years of the establishment of his government printing press speaks to the continuing importance of the work in the wider Ottoman context. For a study of the work, see Ayşe Sidika Oktay, *Kinalzâde Ali Efendi ve Ahlâk-i Alâî*, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2011.

Qinālīzādeh's presentation of the relationship between the ruler and the law is an explicit blend of the values and languages of philosophical, Sufi and jurisprudential discourse: it is, in other words, neatly expressive of what is identified in Chapter 1 as the philosophical-Sufi amalgam. Qinālīzādeh straightforwardly declares the ruler to be a *mujtahid*, which is the jurisprudential term for someone who has the authority to make *new Islamic law* from universal principles by his own reasoning. There is thus no possibility here that the ruler's *siyāsat* laws are ontologically and explicitly anything other than *shari'ah*: how does one conceive of a law made by a *mujtahid* (or by the "Caliph of Real-Truth") in accordance with the universal principles of *shari'ah* other than as *shari'ah*? That the making of new law from universal principles is seen precisely as what I am calling "the identification of Pre-Textual Truth" is evident here also in Qinālīzādeh's characterization of the virtuous ruler as someone who has made himself "in accordance with the traits of God" and who is thus "perfect [*kāmil*] among his kind." Qinālīzādeh is here invoking the concept of the *al-insān al-kāmil*—the Perfect Man who perfects himself by following the Hadith so fundamental to the Sufi project: "Make yourself in accordance with the traits of God [*takhallaqū bi-akhlāq Allāh*]".¹⁴¹ It is this making of himself in accordance with the traits of God that makes this person the Caliph of God and the Caliph of Real-Truth [*hilāfat-i haqiqat*]—that is, the Caliph of the Truth of the Pre-Text. It is also this that renders him (in the expression remembered as Hadith from the Prophet himself) the "Shadow of God on Earth"¹⁴² who corresponds in every way to the Possessor of the shadow including—crucially—in his dispensation over the world. Thus, the *laws* made by the shadow are also the formal [*sūrī*: literally, "of, pertaining to form"] expression and correspondence in the Seen of the Unseen Real-Truth of the Possessor of the shadow.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ The Hadith does not appear in the canonical collections, but is ubiquitous in the Balkans-to-Bengal Sufi discourse. On the concept, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 21–26, and 283–286.

¹⁴² The idea that the Sultan is the Shadow of God appears in Hadiths attributed to the Prophet and routinely cited also in the literature on political theory produced by earlier jurists. For example: "The Sultan is God's shadow on earth: every person who is wronged turns to him," cited by the eleventh-century Shāfi'i, al-Māwardi, *Adab al-dunyā wa al-dīn*, 121; and "the Sultan is God's shadow on earth, whoever gives him good counsel him is rightly-guided, and whoever deceives him has gone astray" cited by the twelfth-century Ḥanbalī, Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-mudi' fī khilāfat al-mustaḍī* (edited by Nājiyah 'Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm), Baghdad: Jāmi'at Baghdād, 1976, 147.

¹⁴³ For the very old idea that the Caliph is the Caliph of God [*khilāfat Allāh*], see Crone and Hinds, 4–23. For the active role of the Caliphs in the law-making process during the 'Abbāsid period see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Caliphs, the '*ulāmā'*, and the Law: Defining the Role and Function of the Caliph in the Early 'Abbāsid Period,'" *Islamic Law and Society* 4 (1997) 1–36.

Nor is it the case that Qinālizādeh is speaking here purely of a theoretical ruler. As with Davvānī and the Sultan Ūzūn-Hasan, the term “true Caliph” as spoken of here by Qinālizādeh points, in the first instance, to his own ruler, the Sultan Süleymān—known to history as *Qānūnī*, “the (Ruler’s-)Lawgiver.” The law-giving activity of Qānūnī Süleymān is too often (as noted above) viewed by us reflexively and definitively as a project of making “secular state law”—but the foregoing presentation by Qinālizādeh of the ruler’s law-making should serve as corrective. The law that Süleymān (and other sultans) made was indeed *qānūn*—that is, ruler’s law; as ruler’s law—as *qānūn*—it was conceived of as part and parcel of the project of the identification and specification in this world of God’s law. It is in this conceptualization and in this light that we should read such self-statements by Muslims as the preamble to Süleymān’s *Qānūnnāmeh* (Law-Code) which states that “God, the True Sovereign, who has commanded Justice [‘*adl*] . . . has made the Sultans the cause of the Order of the world and has executed their rulings upon all the peoples”¹⁴⁴ and which goes on to put forward in the same breath “the constitution of the principles for world-government and the laws of Ottoman custom, which are the pivot of the welfare [*şalâh*] of the world and the pole for the ordering of the affairs of all peoples.”¹⁴⁵ Again, ruler’s law is the “pivot of the welfare of the world”—the “welfare of the world” being, as we have seen, precisely the purpose of Divine law.

In sum, the idea that the making of ruler’s law is somehow a putatively “secular” truth-/legal project separate from a putatively “non-secular” truth-/legal project (identified with *fiqh*) is a notion incoherent and incompatible with Muslims’ own historical conceptualization of ruler’s law. This is also demonstrated by Qānūnī Süleyman’s most public textual self-statement, namely the inscription that appears on the main gate of his great imperial mosque, the Süleymaniye, in Istanbul:

God’s Slave, empowered by Divine Power; His Vicegerent [*khalifah*]
made Mighty by the Glorious Might; Upholder of the Command of the
Protected Book; Executor of Its Rulings unto the Ends of the Inhabited
Quarters of the Earth; Conqueror of the Lands of East and West by the

¹⁴⁴ *ja’ala al-salâtin sababan li-nîzâm al-‘âlam wa naqqadha ahkâma-hum ‘ala kâffat ahl al-wabar wa al-madar.*

¹⁴⁵ *âyîn-i qavâ’id-i cahânbâni vu qavânîn-i ‘urfîyyeh-i ‘Uşmâni kih madâr-i şalâh-i ‘âlam vu manât-i nîzâm-i ümûr-i cümhûr-i kâffah-i ümem dur*; see *Qānūnnâmah-i Âl-i Uşmân: Sultan Süleymân Qānūnî emîrileh cem’ ve telfîq olanân qânuñnamâh olüb Viyânah kutûbhânah-i împarâtürisinde mevcûd nushâhsindan istinsâh edilmiştir* (edited by Mehemed ‘Ârif), Istanbul: Ahmed İhsân, 1329r =1913, hâ’. The *qânuñnamâh* is treated in H. İnalçik, “Suleiman the Lawgiver and Ottoman Law,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 1 (1969) 105–135 (compare İnalçik’s translation at 116).

Support of God and of His Victorious Army; Master of the Dominions of the World; Shadow of God over the Nations; the Sultan of the Sultans of the Arabs and of the non-Arabs; Promulgator of the Sultanic Laws [*nāshir al-qawānīn al-sultāniyyah*]; the tenth of the Ottoman *khāqāns*; the Sultan, son of the Sultan, Sultan Süleyman Hān¹⁴⁶

This statement (which it is worth noting was composed by the chief jurisconsult of the Ottoman empire, the *Seyh-ül-Islam*, Ebū-s-Sū‘ūd)¹⁴⁷ inscribes the law-making activities of the ruler into what—for those who insist on dividing the world into religious and secular—is the ultimate “religious” building: the mosque for congregational worship where the Friday sermon was read to his fellow-Muslims in Süleyman’s name.¹⁴⁸ Here, the Muslim ruler’s designation as “Promulgator of the Sultanic Laws” is strung together with his designation as God’s Vicegerent, God’s Shadow on Earth over the Nations, as upholder of the Qur’ān, and as Divinely-supported warrior, in an array and setting where all these Sultanic qualities, including and especially Sultanic law-making, may quite literally *be seen and read in a single sequence* as part and parcel of what is the *same* undertaking: neither religious nor secular, but *Islamic*.

Qānūnī Süleyman’s inscription on his Sultanic mosque also brings to the fore two elements that are all too often overlooked in the historical study of Islamic law and its relationship to the ruler. The first is the idea that the ruler is divinely supported and divinely deputed—which we have seen stated consistently in the foregoing texts. This idea, formalized in the ruler being “God’s Caliph” and “God’s Shadow on Earth,”¹⁴⁹ serves, self-evidently, to ren-

¹⁴⁶ The Arabic inscription is transcribed by Cevdet Çulpan, “İstanbul Süleymaniye Camii Kitabesi,” in *Kanuni Armağanı*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1970, 291–299, at 293 (compare the translation of Halil İnalçık, “State and Ideology under Sultan Süleyman I,” in Halil İnalçık, *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University and Turkish Ministry of Culture, 1993, 70–94, at 78).

¹⁴⁷ See Çulpan, “İstanbul Süleymaniye Camii Kitabesi,” 297–298.

¹⁴⁸ And where, I can attest as an ear-witness, to this day the supplications made by the Imām after Friday prayers include an invocation for divine blessings upon the soul of Sultan Süleyman, who caused the mosque to be built.

¹⁴⁹ On Ottoman political thought, there is the masterful doctoral thesis of Hüseyin Yilmaz, “The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleyman the Lawgiver (1520–1566),” PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2005; on Mughal notions of kingship, see the relevant portions of Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar’s Reign, with special reference to Abu'l Fazl (1556–1605)*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975, especially 339–417; and the important recent monograph of Azfar Moin, which valuably elucidates the concept of *sāhib-i qirān* or Master of the Cosmic Conjunction by which the ruler was located and legitimated in terms of his place in the cosmic economy of truth, and argues that the Mughals developed a system “in which the sovereign was both the political leader and spiritual chief of the realm,” A. Azfar Moin, *The Millenial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in*

der the law-making function of the ruling institution conceptually coherent and consonant with the Revelatory economy of Divine Truth—and *thus as* politically and socially legitimate.¹⁵⁰ Only when we learn to conceive of the ruling institution—which, of course, comprised in its decision-making processes not the individual person of the ruler, but also the collective wisdom of his consultative and administrative elites—as the maker of law from Pre-Text will we be able to understand how it is that Muslims viewed ruler’s law as Islamic law.¹⁵¹

The second element—also consistently stated in the foregoing texts—is the centrality of the values of *justice* and *human welfare* to the constitution of the excellent or virtuous state and society. A community which valorizes the ideas of justice and human welfare as so central to its self-conception of virtue and excellence *must think and speak about the constitution of these values at the center of its larger conversations as a community*—and it thus behoves us when conceptualizing the values of that society to listen and pay attention to the *broader* social and discursive location and content of these conversations about justice and human welfare,¹⁵² and not to assume too readily that the discourses of the *fuqahā’*-jurisprudents enjoyed a monopoly over the understanding and construction of these values. As Fazlur Rahman points out, “From Tūsī onwards, the Muslim ethical writers began to stress the virtue of justice. One reason for this is that, since the essence of all virtue is the ‘mean’ between extremes, justice itself constitutes the essence of all means. Thus, a

Islam, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, 177. A strong-minded study that conveys the social awe of the ruler and the ruling institution in the period before the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1997.

¹⁵⁰ This is neatly summed up in the statement in the eighteenth-century Javanese Book of the Origins of the Prophets (*Kitāb Usūlbiya*) made by the Queen Grandmother of Java, Ratu Pakubuwana, and put in the form of an address by God to Muhammad: “The being of a king is the being of the All-Disposing, his attributes are the attributes of God, his works are the works of God: the Muhammadan king is king of knowledge of God [dat ing ratu iya ananng Yyang Widi, sifate sifat ing Yyang, afngal ing ratu anfngl ing Widi, ratu Muhammad ratu ilmullahi],” cited from the unpublished manuscript of the *Kitab Usulbiya* in Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java*, 67 footnote 124 (compare Ricklefs’ translation).

¹⁵¹ I have used the term “ruling institution” here not merely in acknowledgement of al-Fārābī’s aforementioned notion of the “collective sovereign”—that is of the office of ruler as constituted not merely by an individual, but by the full legitimate ruling apparatus of the state—but also because, as a historical fact, decision-making in pre-modern states was reached by processes of consultation within an elite connected to the ruler.

¹⁵² See Chapter 1. The centrality of the concept of justice to rulership in the history of polities of Muslims has recently been sketched by Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization*, Oxford: Routledge, 2013.

person who has justice (*'adāla*) necessarily has all other virtues as well.”¹⁵³ That rulers were themselves profoundly self-conscious of their defining responsibility being the administration of justice is something we have seen etched on all three of the wine-cups of the Emperor Jahāngīr, which speak of the ruler as “Moon-in-the-Heavens of Justice,” as “the Emperor of Emperors who spreads Justice,” and of how “from the radiance of his justice the world was filled with light.”¹⁵⁴ A nice expression of the pervasiveness of the value of justice is seen in the forcefulness with which it is emphasized by Jahangīr’s contemporary, Khwushhāl Khān, the leader of the Khatak tribe of Pushtōns, who, it is worth reiterating, wrote his *Dastarnāmah* in Pashtō as “an instruction and advice for my children, brothers, friends, and lovers”:

An Unbeliever [*kāfir*], if he is just [*'ādil*], is better than a Muslim ruler
who rules with injustice.

Concern yourself with justice [*'adālat*] and fair judgement [*inṣāf*],
not with Unbelief [*kufr*] and *dīn*,
For it is those that are necessary to preserve the state;
Justice and fair judgement displayed by an Unbeliever
Are better than the injustice of a *dīn*-observing Ruler!

Nūshirvān was an Unbeliever, but displayed justice in his conduct of affairs, and the Prophet spoke of him with praise.

The Prophet, who, in the age of Nūshirvān
Was made the eye and light of the world,
Said, “I am free of injustice –
For I am the son of the age of Nūshirvān!”

There is a Hadith of the Refuge of Prophethood: “An hour of justice is better than sixty years of worship spent standing in prayer at night, and fasting through the day.”

... Deputed sovereignty [*vilāyat*], rulership [*mulk rāni*], government [*siyāsat*], and vicegerency [*khilāfat*] are given by God, the Exalted—and are not an easy thing. The just ruler is the vicegerent of God; the unjust

¹⁵³ Fazlur Rahman, “Aklāq,” in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982-, 1:719–723, at 722.

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 1.

and oppressive ruler is the vicegerent of Satan. A Hadith: “The deputed ruler, if he is just, is the vicegerent of the All-Merciful; and if he is unjust, is the vicegerent of Satan.”¹⁵⁵

The deputed sovereign should act in every matter in accordance with the *shara* [*muwāfiq pih shara*], with his own wisdom [*firāsat*], with custom [*'urf*], with maintenance of peace [*ṣulḥ*], and of welfare [*ṣalāḥ*], so that good [*khayriyat*] redounds to the people.¹⁵⁶

Here, Khwushhāl Khān unequivocally places justice above *dīn* as a value constituting Vicegerency of God. Justice is thus a Divine value, but is separated out from worship: thus, one can enact this pre-eminent Divine value whether or not one is worshipful—and, thus, even the just Unbeliever is better than the unjust Muslim. To be just, the ruler must act in accordance with *shara*—to accomplish which he must use his own wisdom, follow custom, and give priority to the maintenance of peace and welfare. The model of justice presented here is the pre-Islamic Sasanian Emperor Khusraw I Ānūshīrvān (501–579), in relation to whose justice the Prophet himself is presented as scion—indeed, is self-presented as scion. Ānūshīrvān is also one of those pre-Islamic figures who became the embodiment of Islamic value in Con-Text—he is a Con-Textual personification of the Islamic value of justice.¹⁵⁷ Justice,

¹⁵⁵ *kīh kāfir vī chih 'ādil vī bihtar haghah musalmānah chih da mulk pah kār zālim vī. 'adl o inṣāf dān kufr nah dīn / ānchih dar hifz-i mulk darkārast // 'adl-i bī-dīn nīzām-i 'ālam rā / bihtar az zulm-i shāh-i dindārast. // Nūshīrvān chih kāfir vo da-'adālat da ṣifat kār yih pah lās nīvalī vo payghambar satyālī dī. payghambar kih dar 'āhd-i Shīrīvān / ba-rukh gasht chashm o chirāgh-i jahān // baguftā kih az zulm z-ān sādah am / kih dar 'āhd-i Nūshīrvān zādah am. hadīs da nubuvvat panāh dī: al-'adl sā'atan khayr min 'ibādat sittīn sanah qiyām layālī-hā wa siyām nahārī-hā*, Khwushhāl Khān Khaṭak, *Dastārnāmah*, 107 (compare the translation of V. V. Kushev, “A Pashtun Ruler and Literary Figure of the Seventeenth Century on Political Ethics,” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 6.2 (2000) 20–38, at 22, and 30–31). The wide circulation of the values expressed by Khwushhāl Khān Khaṭak may be gauged from the fact that the same opening couplets appear in another sixteenth-century work on ethics from South Asia, the Persian-language *Akhlaq-i Jahāngīrī*, while other invocations of the Prophet Muhammad’s associating himself with the justice of Nūshīrvān appear in the earlier *Tuhfah-i Qutb-Shāhī*; see Alam, “Shari'a, Akhlāq and Governance,” 73.

¹⁵⁶ *da vilāyat mulkrānī siyāsat khilāfat da khudāy ta'ālā dī sih āsān kār nah dī. Har chih 'adl kā khalīfah dā rahmān day kih jōr va zulm vo kā khalīfah da shaytān day... hadīs: al-wāli idhā kāna 'ādilan fa-huwa khalīfah al-rahmān wa idhā kāna zāliman fa-huwa khalīfah al-shaytān... vālī... va'rāh kār day muwāfaq pah shara' kā pah khapal firāsat pah 'urf pah ᷱulḥ pah ᷱalāḥ har shān chih da khalq khayriyat pah kakhay*, Khwushhāl Khān Khaṭak, *Dastārnāmah*, 108.

¹⁵⁷ E.g., the great Ottoman *litterateur* and bureaucrat Muṣṭafā 'Āli, described Sultan Süleymān Qānūnī's law-making activity as “emulating Nūshīrvān the Just,” İnalcık, “Suleiman the Law-giver and Ottoman Law,” 111. Ānūshīrvān's place in Con-Text has a substantive basis in the history of Islamic law: it is Ānūshīrvān who put in place, before the Caliphal conquest, the *kharāj* tax that would become the definitive institution of land-taxation in Islamic history—indeed, the *kharāj* is referred to in the historical literature of the first centuries of Islam as “the *kharāj* of

Khwushħäl Khān tells us, is a universal value that is bigger than what is contained and bound up in the Prophetic model alone. So, in thinking about the value of *justice* as constitutive of man's vicegerency of God—that is, as constitutive of Islam—we need to think and look beyond the Text.

There are six summary observations to be made here on the basis of the foregoing. First, the above passages from al-Fārābī, Ṭūsī, Davvānī, Muḥsin Fānī Kāshmīrī, Qīnālīzādeh and Khwushħäl Khān illustrate an insistent, ongoing re-iterative tradition of philosophy-based ethics and political theory at the heart of the *paideia* of the educated ruling sectors of the societies of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex down the centuries. Second, these writings coupled with the innumerable examples of ruler's law in action show that the defining normative statements about one of the most crucial elements in the conceptualization of law in societies of Muslims—namely, the relationship between the state and the law, between law made by rulers and law made by *fuqahā'*-jurisprudents, between law made from pure reason and social custom, and law made by the methods of scripture-based hermeneutics, between *siyāsah* and *fiqh*—are to be found *not* in the genre of *fiqh*-legal texts *per se*, but rather in works of *akhlāq*-ethics. Third, these normative discourses do not conceptualize ruler's law and jurists' law as ontologically separate—but as part and parcel of the same Muslim undertaking of identifying the Truth necessary for the welfare of the community. Fourth, whatever the sources of and whatever the procedures by which ruler's laws were made, so long as these specific laws accorded with or did not violate the universal principles of Divine Law (the broad protection of *dīn*, life, intellect, lineage, property and honour), they are conceived of as fulfilling the purposes of Divine Law—which is another way of saying that they are regarded as expressions of *shari'ah*. Fifth, the actions of rulers themselves, and of the jurists participating in the legal apparatus of the state, indicate that this *conceptualization* was shared by most working parties involved in the larger project of the formulation, administration and application of law. The natural relationship in which ruler's law and jurists' law were understood to stand was not a relationship of antagonism (although this might sometimes have happened and have been expressed), but more a working legal partnership in which each partner brings his priorities and methods to the table. And sixth, the

Khusraw." The early Caliphal state also administered the *jizyah* poll-tax along the lines which Ānūshirvān had calibrated; see al-Dūri, *al-Nuzum al-islāmiyyah*, 110–116. For a brief survey of Ānūshirvān's image in historiographical writings of Muslims, see Muhammad Taqī Imānpūr, Zuhayr Ṣiyāmiyān Garjī, and Sānāz Rahīm Bigī, "Sarkūbgar-i *bīd'at* va *namād-i 'adālat*: Ānūshirvān dar *tārīkh-nigārī-yi Islāmī*," *Muṭāli'iāt-i Tārīkh-i Islām* 2.16 (Autumn 1389 sh [2010]) 7–28.

value that emerges as pre-eminent in this conceptualization of Islamic law is the value of *justice* which requires, for its constitution, the Muslim to draw on sources and resources for Truth beyond the Text.



These six observations indicate some further points of salience to the larger arguments I am making. First, what we have here is an important instance of a fact that has repeatedly been emphasized in the foregoing: which is that Islamic norms—even, we now see, as regards the conceptualization and operation of law—are *diffused* through the discourses and practices of societies of Muslims. The operation of ruler’s law fits the conceptualization of Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation. The ruler is reaching beyond the Text to the Pre-Text to identify the form of Truth—that is, the specific law—that will be meaningful for the here-and-now by producing *maslahah*-welfare. In structural terms, the ruler is doing exactly what *fujahā*-jurisprudents do when they try to locate the Divine *hukm*—the rule, or value, or judgement—that is appropriate to a particular case or circumstance. It is worthwhile here to reiterate the statement of Ebrahim Moosa cited in Chapter 5:

There is a cosmology underlying Muslim juristic theology or legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). This cosmological narrative enables us to bridge the discursive divide between the empirical and transcendental realms . . . the *hukm* proper is a transcendental norm, of which the empirical *hukm* is but a temporal manifestation . . . for the classical and medieval jurists, the term *hukm* was the locus for an amalgam of the eternal and temporal dimensions . . . [the jurist] exerts him/herself to unveil the already existing rule by “dis-covering” the empirical indicators that signify the transcendent rule.¹⁵⁸

This is precisely what the ruling institution does. The ruling institution actively participates in the process of discovering God’s law by determining, through the identification of *maslahah*-welfare in any given legal circumstance, *what God wants*.

Jurists also do this: as Anver Emon has put it when discussing the role of *maṣlaḥah*-welfare in jurists’ law, “*maṣlaḥa* is the conceptual site where fact and value are fused in nature . . . *maṣlaḥa* is a mediating concept between the

¹⁵⁸ Moosa, “Allegory of the Rule,” 2, 7, 16, 19.

purposes of the law (*maqāṣid*) and the ratio legis of a new law (*hukm*).¹⁵⁹ The relationship between welfare and the purpose of the law (*maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*) is so fused that, Muhammad Hashim Kamali says, “The *maṣālih* (pl. of *maṣlahah*) thus become another name for the *maqāṣid* and the ‘*ulamā’* have used the two terms almost interchangeably”—Kamali himself uses the term “*maṣālih-cum-maqāṣid*” (effectively, “welfare-cum-purpose”).¹⁶⁰ The difference between the ruler’s law-making operation and the jurists’ law-making operation—between the ruler’s-law mode of identifying what God wants, and the jurists’-law mode of identifying what God wants—is one of method and sources: or, to be more precise, the difference lies in the weightage and consideration and *trajectory* given to various Pre-Textual elements in the larger Con-Text of methods and sources and means for arriving at Truth. The weightage given to *maṣlahah-cum-maqāṣid* in ruler’s law—where it is consistently presented as the *primary* criterion on which the ruler legislates—critically alters the constitution of the law by critically altering the location of the law in the dimensions of the Revelatory complex: *the emphasis on maṣlahah changes the nature of the law* by engaging intensively with Pre-Text in/and Con-Text. This is brought into stark relief by the fact that this *maṣlahah*-*(cum-maqāṣid)*-based notion of law is reiterated in a genre of intellectual discourse—namely, *akhlāq*-ethics—in which the animating principle of conceptualization and evaluation is a historical tradition of universal philosophical *reason* understood to be in consonance with the universal Wisdom and purpose of the Divine *nāmūs*. The effect of this discourse is to place reason at the center of the ruler’s making of new Islamic laws that are in consonance with the universal Wisdom and purpose of the Divine *nāmūs*.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Anver M. Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 194.

¹⁶⁰ Kamali, “*Maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*,” 195.

¹⁶¹ To put it from the perspective of juridical discourse: *fiqh*-jurisprudence recognizes that the same process of legal reasoning can lead to more than one answer: that is, to more than one valid *hukm*. Indeed, the basic principle of Islamic juridical pluralism is that any ruling arrived at by a process of sound legal reasoning is correct—thus, two legal schools might arrive at directly contradictory rulings in regard to the identical legal case, but both schools will accept the ruling of the other school as correct to the purpose at hand. In other words, the same transcendental value can manifest itself as two contradictory temporal values. Now, this jurisprudential schema has four significant structural implications. First, it assumes that the Purposes of (or Meanings behind) Divine Law can be identified. This includes the specific purpose of a specific bit of Divine Legislation—that is, its *‘illah* or *ratio legis*; or it may be the purposes of Divine Legislation at large—that is, the *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*. Second, it assumes that the Purposes of (or Meaning behind) Divine Law—the *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*—can be fulfilled by forms of law (such as custom) that derive from other than the Text. Third, it assumes that the same *maqṣad* can be fulfilled in more than one way. Fourth, it assumes that there is a way of testing whether or not the Purpose of Divine law is being fulfilled—which is whether or not the welfare or *maṣlahah* of the subjects of

I do not think it too much of a generalization to say that whereas the jurists' law-making operation proceeds in a trajectory of *reading God's purpose from Textual sources into the world*, the ruler's law-making operation proceeds in a trajectory of *reading God's purpose out of the world (including the Unseen world) into Textual sources*. In broad terms, ruler's law represents a reversal of the jurists' hermeneutical trajectory, and a reconstitution thereby of the working relationship of the component elements and sources of the law. The discourse of philosophical-political theory that is present as a part of the Context of Revelation—that is, as a part of the apparatus of meanings with which the concept of Revelation is historically engaged, and from which Revelation is made meaningful—charges the ruler with the responsibility to make new law in the interests of the *welfare/maṣlahah* of the time: that is, in the interest of the welfare of the *people* of the time. The concept of *maṣlahah* is not exclusive to the *akhlāq* literature—it is also native to *fiqh*-jurisprudential discourse as a principle for making law. But—and this is crucial—for the majority of jurists *maṣlahah* is an *ancillary* principle that is taken into consideration only after primary attention is paid and consideration given to Textual sources.¹⁶²

the law is being served. This, in turn, assumes, fifth, that welfare or *maṣlahah* itself is susceptible to identification. The foregoing statements in *akhlāq* texts of the legal office of the Ruler seem to contain nothing that contradicts any of the foregoing. Rather, the fundamental guiding principle that is reiterated in the foregoing texts is that it is the Ruler's responsibility to make specific laws in response to the interests of the welfare of the people in the circumstances of the time. This does not mean that jurists and rulers did not disagree as a practical matter over whether particular instances of rulers' legislation were in accord with the principles of Divine Law—but the point is that this disagreement is no different in substance to the disagreements that jurists routinely had with each other over whether or not a given ruling of a jurist was correct and in accord with the Divine Law. To that end, the jurists arrived at the maxim that any ruling arrived at by a qualified jurist acting with sincere purpose and due diligence as regards method is to be taken as a valid deduction of Divine Law. The assumption that the Purposes (or Meaning) of the Divine Law is *knowable* is, of course, a fundamental principle held by the *fugaha*-jurisprudents; after all, were the purposes of Divine Law unknowable the entire jurisprudential project might as well just pack its bags and go home—since there would be no means by which to deduce, in those numerous instances where the Divine Legislator has not taken the trouble to specify His value-ruling (*hukm*), what His ruling would actually have been. As Bernard Weiss notes: “The jurists adhered steadfastly to the view that the divine intent was always discoverable in principle, even when it was not discovered in fact,” Bernard G. Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998, 64.

¹⁶² The jurist gives priority to a hierarchy of sources—*Qur’ān*, *sunnah* (Hadith), *ijmā‘* (consensus), *qiyyās* (analogy), *istihsān* (equity), *maṣlahah* (welfare), *‘urf* (custom)—with which he engages in a structured hermeneutical process of inductive and deductive reasoning and dialectics, so as to arrive at a *hukm* that effects in this world the salutary value of the *hukm* of the other world. While *fiqh*-jurisprudence places tremendous emphasis on Textual hermeneutics—with the lion's share of works of *uṣūl al-fiqh* being devoted to modes and problems of the linguistic and semantic construction of texts, modes of reading, and of textual interpretation—*fiqh*-jurisprudence also recognizes the obvious fact that the reading of the Text of *Qur’ān* (which contains a relatively limited body of legislation) and of even the much larger corpus of Hadith (the function of which

In the *akhlāq* discourse, however, *maṣlahah* is presented as the *primary*—if not the fundamental legal principle and *value* for the ruler: it is the governing value-principle in the making of ruler’s law. In other words, what we have here is an *alternative conceptualization of law*—alternative as regards the *priorities of law* (here: *maṣlahah/welfare*), the *locus of lawmaking* (here: the state), and the *sources of law* (here: reason and custom)¹⁶³—but a conceptualization that nonetheless arises directly from the spatiality of Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, and that presents ruler’s law as an expression of the Truth and Meaning of Revelation. The point then is not merely that ruler’s law is presented in the *akhlāq* literature as a potentially more capacious and flexible conceptualization of Islamic law than jurists’ law—but that ruler’s law is presented squarely as a form of *Islamic law*.

In taking human reason and custom as its primary material for the fulfillment of the Divine purpose, ruler’s law emerges as something resembling what is today called *natural law*, in that ruler’s law functions on the assumption that the Divine purpose—the preservation of *dīn*, life, intellect, family, property and honour—can be identified from the observation and experience of the natural behaviour of the human being in the world, and can be fulfilled on the basis of laws made from the basis of that rational identification.¹⁶⁴ Further, ruler’s law gauges the success of its attempt to fulfil the larger or general

is precisely to articulate and prescribe the specific form of Islamic law and praxis), is insufficient (even by the exercise of analogy) to the infinite variety of local situations and cases arising which require legal regulation. Thus, to fulfil the “Purposes of the Sharī‘ah” (*maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*, *fujūhā*—jurisprudents will use legal maxims (*al-qawā'id al-fiqhiyyah*)—presumptively (and sometimes literally) based in Qur'an and Hadith, to help them locate and identify equity (*istihsān*) and public welfare (*maṣlahah*)—which might very well be located by the jurists in existing custom. For an admirably clear study of *maṣlahah* in the *fiqh*-jurisprudence discourse of the first eight centuries of Islam, see Opwis, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purposes of the Law*.

¹⁶³ Thus, even if a ruler’s intervention in a given circumstance does not extend beyond choosing between different or contradictory positions arrived at by jurists, the criteria by which he will make the decision is not by assessing the process of legal deduction by which the respective positions were arrived at, but rather, which position is most in the interest of *maṣlahah*.

¹⁶⁴ There is no single definition of “natural law,” but here is a *locus classicus*: “What are principles of natural law? . . . There is (i) a set of basic practical principles which indicate the basic forms of human flourishing as goods to be pursued and realized, and which are in one way or another used by everyone who considers what to do, however unsound his conclusions; and (ii) a set of basic methodological requirements of practical reasonableness (itself one of the basic forms of human flourishing) which distinguish sound from unsound practical thinking and which, when all brought to bear, provide the critieria for distinguishing between acts that (always or in particular circumstances) are reasonable-all-things-considered (and not merely relative-to-a-particular-purpose) and acts that are unreasonable-all-things-considered i.e. between ways of acting that are morally right or morally wrong—thus enabling one to formulate (iii) a set of general moral standards,” John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 (2nd edition), 23.

Divine purpose by measuring whether or not the law may be observed to serve the welfare of and maintain the health of its subjects. The idea that the ruler's laws of *siyāsat* and *'urf* that are arrived at by individual and collective reason, common sense, collective ethics and communal experience—that is to say: laws made by engagement with sources and indicators *other* than the Text—are capable of fulfilling the Purposes of the Divine Law/*maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* by providing welfare/*mashlahah* means that these non *fiqh*-jurisprudence methodologies and epistemologies *also* have the practical capacity to dis-cover the Divine Law of the Pre-Text for the here-and-now. This means, in turn, that, just as there exists a co-relation or correspondence between the Text and the Divine Law of the Pre-Text, so there exists a co-relation or correspondence between these non-Textual or *natural* sources of law and the Divine Law of the Pre-text. The reason we can access the Divine Law of the Pre-Text from the Text is that the Truth of the Pre-Text is Revealed in the Text. *Similarly*, the reason that we can access the Divine Law of the Pre-Text from our study of *nature*—that is, from the historical and sociological and anthropological study and experience of human behaviour as it is productive of welfare and harm—must be that the Divine Law/*nāmūs/shari‘ah* of the Pre-Text is Revealed in its diffusion in (human) Nature.

This is, in fact, a relatively commonplace idea in the history of Islamic societies—at least it is relatively commonplace if we look for it in diffusion beyond the discourses of law as they are conventionally and strictly conceived. The statement by Ṭūsī presented in Chapter 2 is worth revisiting:

Practical Philosophy is the acknowledgement of benefits in voluntary movements and disciplined acts on the part of the human species, in a way that conduces to the ordering of man's life here and hereafter . . . It should be recognized that the principles of beneficial works and virtuous acts on the part of the human species (implying the ordering of their affairs and states) lie, fundamentally, either in nature or in convention. The principle of nature applies in cases whose particulars conform to the understanding of people of insight and the experiences of men of sagacity, unvarying and unchanging with the variations of ages or the revolutions in modes of conduct and traditions. Where the principle lies in convention, if the cause of the convention be the agreed opinion of the community thereon, one speaks of Manners and Customs; if the cause of the convention be, however, the exigency of the opinion of a great man, fortified by divine assistance, such as a prophet or an imam, one speaks of Divine Ordinances.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean Ethics* (translated by Wickens), 28–29.

It is not just the Balkans-to-Bengal philosophers and philosophy-inflected intellectuals who held this view. I should like here to illustrate the geographical and temporal ubiquity of the notion of the accessibility of Divine Truth by reason and custom by way of two conceptual statements from two very different times and places in history: ninth-century Baghdad, and twentieth-century Malaya. More than a thousand years ago, the Baghdadi *littérateur*, Qur'ān scholar, and idiosyncratic defender of the early Hadith movement against the early speculative theologians, Ibn Qutaybah (828–885), wrote in his encyclopaedic book *The Well-Springs of Information* (*'Uyūn al-akhbār*):

This book, although not about Qur'ān or Sunna, and the laws [*sharā'i'*] of *dīn*, or knowledge of what is lawful and what is forbidden, yet leads on to the heights of matters, and shows the way to noble ethics [*karīm al-akhlāq*]; it restrains from baseness, turns away from ugly things, incites to right conduct and fair management, to temperate politics (*rifq al-siyāsah*) and to rendering the land prosperous. For the way to Allah is not one, nor is all that is good confined to night-prayers and continued fasting and the knowledge of the lawful and the forbidden; on the contrary, the ways to Him are many and the doors of the good are wide. The welfare of *dīn* [*ṣalāḥ al-dīn*] depends on the welfare of the temporal [*salāḥ al-zamān*], and the welfare of the temporal depends on the welfare of government [*salāḥ al-sultān*], whilst the welfare of government depends—besides the help of Allah—on leading aright and providing proper understanding.¹⁶⁶

Ibn Qutaybah—who states expressly that his book is addressed equally at those who pursue this world [*tālib al-dunyā*] and those who seek the Hereafter [*tālib al-akhirah*]¹⁶⁷—is saying here that there exists vital and necessary truth and virtue whose provenance and substance is *other than* Divine Reve-

¹⁶⁶ *fa-inna hādha al-kitāb wa-in lam yakun fī al-qur'ān wa al-sunnah wa sharā'i' al-dīn wa 'ilm al-halāl wa al-harām dāl 'alā ma 'alī al-umūr murshid li-karīm al-akhlāq zājir 'an al-danā'a nāhin 'an al-qabīh bā'ith 'alā ṣawāb al-tadbīr wa ḥusn al-taqdīr wa rifq al-siyāsah wa 'imārat al-ard wa laysa al-tarīq ilā Allāh wāhidan wa lā kull al-khayr mujtama'a 'an fi tahajjud al-layl wa sard al-siyām wa 'ilm al-halāl wa al-harām bal al-turuq ilay-hi kathīrah wa abwāb al-khayr wāsi'ah wa ṣalāḥ al-dīn bi-ṣalāḥ al-zamān wa ṣalāḥ al-zamān bi-ṣalāḥ al-sultān wa ṣalāḥ al-sultān ba'd tawfiq Allāh bi-al-irshād wa ḥusn al-tabṣīr, Abū Muhammād 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawarī, *Kitāb 'uyūn al-akhbār*, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1925, 1:yā'. I have emended at certain points the generally masterful translation of Josef Horowitz, "Ibn Quteiba's 'Uyun al-Akhbar (Translated into English)," *Islamic Culture* 4 (1930) 171–198, at 173–174. The importance of this passage is well noted by Noah Feldman, "The Ethical Literature," 110, and the subsequent discussion.*

¹⁶⁷ Ibn Qutaybah, *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, 1:5; Horowitz, "Ibn Quteiba's 'Uyun al-Akhbar," 175.

lation and its prescriptions: “The way to Allah is not one, nor is all that is good confined to night-prayers and continued fasting and the knowledge of the lawful and the forbidden; on the contrary, the ways to Him are many and the doors of the good are wide.” This is the vital and necessary truth and virtue of the *temporal [al-zamān]*: that is, the *human*. Ibn Qutaybah, however, is going beyond this to say that the *success* of the human engagement with the Divine Truth is *dependent on* the proper cultivation and application of *human/temporal truth and virtue*: “The welfare of *dīn* depends on the welfare of the temporal, and the welfare of the temporal depends on the welfare of government, whilst the welfare of government depends—besides the help of Allah—on leading aright and providing proper understanding.”

In other words, the successful execution of *dīn*, which is represented by Qur’ān, Sunnah, *shari‘ah*, prayer, fasting, etcetera, *depends on* sound human initiative, which is represented by noble ethics, fair management, temperate politics, leading aright, and proper understanding. What this suggests is that noble ethics, fair management, temperate politics, leading aright, and proper understanding are human capacities that need to be cultivated *as a means to Truth*. In the absence of noble ethics, fair management, temperate politics, leading aright, and proper understanding, the engagement with Qur’ān, Sunnah, *shari‘ah*, prayer, fasting, *etcetera*, will not accomplish the goal of human virtue and welfare (in this world and the next). Ibn Qutaybah is effectively saying: “What do they know of *dīn* who only *dīn* know?”¹⁶⁸ Cultivated human sensibility and judgement are thus a *valid, integral* and *necessary* part of the larger scheme of Revelation; following them and following the Text *through* them brings one to the Divine goal.

It is on the basis of the mutual affinity between the T/truth sent by God and of the truth attained by humans that Ibn Qutaybah goes on to invoke the pre-Islamic Persian adage (attributed to the archetypal Just King, Ardeshir) that we have already seen invoked by Ṭūsī, and which, Noah Feldman notes, “came to be a commonplace in Islamic ethical writings”:¹⁶⁹ “Government (*ṣultān*) and *dīn* are two brothers, the one of whom cannot subsist without the other”¹⁷⁰ (in Ṭūsī’s version: “are twins”). This mutual dependency of government—by which Ibn Qutaybah means *good* government: which is precisely

¹⁶⁸ For the benefit of the uncolonized: “And what should they know of England who only England know?” Rudyard Kipling, “The English Flag” (1891), in Rudyard Kipling, *The Complete Verse*, London: Kyle Cathie Limited, 1990, 178–179, at 178; from which, more profoundly, “What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?” C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, London: Hutchinson, 1963, 11.

¹⁶⁹ Feldman, “The Ethical Literature,” 111.

¹⁷⁰ *al-sultān wa al-dīn akhwān lā yaqūm ahadu-humā illā bi-al-ākhar*, Ibn Qutaybah, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, 1:5; Horowitz, “Ibn Quteiba’s ‘Uyun al-Akhbar,” 188. See the appearance of the adage

the exercise of noble ethics, fair management, temperate politics, leading aright, and proper understanding—and *dīn* is the key for the ultimately successful living of a virtuous Muslim life. Implicit in this image is that the two brothers, *sulṭān* and *dīn*, share the same parent—that is, they both *go back to the same origin or source*; we might say they share the same genetic matter. And these two brothers are consonant and harmonious with each other. In the terms that I have presented, what Ibn Qutaybah is saying is that just as the Text of the Revelation stems from and gives access to the Truth of the Pre-Text, so do the cultivated human capacities stem from and give access to the Truth of the Pre-Text: they are both of the one source, they are both means to the same end, they are necessary to each other. The *locus standi* of cultivated human sense and sensibility, then, is precisely the fact that these human capacities are, like the Text of Revelation, also part of the phenomenon of the Revelation of the Truth of the Pre-Text—like the Text, these human capacities originate in and are consonant with that Truth and thus help to reveal that Truth. It is this *consonance* of the human virtues with the Pre-Text that renders these human virtues a means by which to access the Truth of the Pre-Text.

Let us turn now to a very different time and place. The famous Minangkabau Malay axiom or *perbilangan ‘ādat* (literally, “custom-saying”)—first published in a scholarly context from “field-work” by the British Malaya colonial administrator Andrew Caldecott in 1918 (but, of course, in circulation long before then) and characterized by a more recent scholar of Minangkabau society as nothing less than an “ultimate sacred proposition”¹⁷¹—states:

Custom is hinged to Law;
 Law is hinged to the Book of God.
 If Custom [‘ādat] is strong, Law [*hukum*] is not upset;
 If Law is strong, Custom is not upset.
 The mother of Law is harmony [*muwāfakat*].
 The mother of Custom is harmony.¹⁷²

in the foundational *akhlāq* work of Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlāq*, 142; see the translation by Zurayk, *The Refinement of Character*, 128.

¹⁷¹ Michael G. Peletz, *Social History and Evolution in the Interrelationship of Adat and Islam in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan*, Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, (Research Notes and Discussion Paper No. 27), 1981, 17.

¹⁷² ‘ādat bersendi *hukum*, *hukum* bersendi *kitāb-Allāh*. kuwat ‘ādat ta’gadoh *hukum*, kuwat *hukum* ta’gadoh ‘ādat. ibū *hukum muwāfakat*, ibū ‘ādat *muwāfakat*, first recorded in a scholarly context by A. Caldecott (and R. O. Winstedt), “Jelebu Customary Songs and Sayings,” *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 78 (1918) 3–41, at 26 (compare Caldecott’s translation at 27; I have also altered the transliteration); compare also the translation of Michael G. Peletz,

Hukum, the standard Malay colloquial abbreviation of *hukum syarak*—that is, the “rulings of *shar‘* [*shari‘ah*]”—functions here as equivalent to Ibn Qutaybah’s *dīn*, while ‘*ādat* or “custom”—which is precisely the collective wisdom by which people govern themselves—is here the equivalent of Ibn Qutaybah’s “noble ethics, fair management, temperate politics, leading aright, and proper understanding.” The relationship between Custom and the Law of God is depicted here by the concept of the *hinge* (Malay: *sendī*, literally “joint” or “sinew”—an especially vivid image in such a rich woodworking culture as that of the Minangkabau—which conveys a mutually balancing, supple, mobile and supportive relationship joining human custom and the divine law.¹⁷³ In this artisanal image, human custom and divine law are *conjoined* in structural intercourse to produce the dynamic working equilibrium of a society of Muslims, and the mutual supportive action of their respective strengths establishes a harmonious balance in the world. This is possible because they share a common source or, as the axiom literally puts it: a common “mother” (*ibū*). This is an expression which is strikingly reminiscent of the Islamicized (that is, made Islamic) pre-Islamic Persian adage cited above where human custom and God’s law are “brothers.” The common source-mother here is *muwāfakat*, literally “agreement,” “concord,” or “reconciliation”—which in the context of a hinge expresses the sense of balance or *harmony*.¹⁷⁴ The two conjoined entities are interdependent and are as brothers that, by virtue of their common origin, are in working harmony.¹⁷⁵ Thus this proverb, which summarizes a truth that is in wide axiomatic circulation and *application* in Minangkabau society,¹⁷⁶ conceptualizes *shari‘ah* and custom as mutually con-

“Islam and the Cultural Politics of Legitimacy: Malaysia in the Aftermath of September 11,” in Robert W. Hefner (editor), *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 240–272, at 263.

¹⁷³ “*sēndī* . . . joint, sinew. Of the sinews of the body . . . Also of the joints of mountings of a framework,” R. J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, Mytilene: Salavopoulos and Kinderlis, 1932, 2:432. Also: “*sindi* . . . joint, articulation. *Peniakit kan-pada segala sindi-nia* pains in all his joints . . . *sindi jāri* joints of the fingers,” William Marsden, *A Dictionary of the Malay Language*, London: Cox and Baylis, 1812, 187.

¹⁷⁴ The motto of the royal family of Johor is *muwāfakat itu berkat*, which Wilkinson translated in his classic dictionary as “Harmony is Blessing,” Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, 2:147.

¹⁷⁵ The tendency on the part of modern Malay scholars concerned to bring customary law into line with *fiqh*-law is to read this *perbilangan* as meaning that “*Ādat depends on hukum*,” thereby subordinating ‘*ādat* to *hukum*. In my assessment, this is a clear misconstruction of the relationship being expressed, which is one of mutual (inter-)dependence and not of unilateral dependence.

¹⁷⁶ Caldecott recorded the saying in 1918, and Peletz mentions hearing it “many times in the course of fieldwork in the state of Negeri Sembilan during the 1970s and 1980s,” Peletz, “The Cultural Politics of Legitimacy,” 263.

nected, harmonious, inter-dependent and from the same source (just as we saw in the formulation of Ibn Qutaybah). This sense of custom as being in working harmony with the universal purpose of God's law is conveyed in another *perbilangan* which says:

Rulings of Custom are three matters.

First: Custom of the Tall-Grass—that which is manifest.

Second: Custom of the Pillar—that which is human agreement.

Third: Custom of God's Book—that which is the rulings of the Qur'ān.¹⁷⁷

Here, one has the sense that when *rulings* [*kepūtusan*] are made, three matters are *customarily* considered: the *self-evident law of nature* that presents itself irresistibly like the tall grass, the law *constructed by the agreements of men* that is built-up like a pillar, and the *law sent-down* in God's book. Each of these three is indicative and productive of its own *'ādat*—its own customs or norms. The goods of nature and human reason here (as with Ibn Qutaybah) are presented as the repository and enactment of collective experiential wisdom—as a sort of collective “practical philosophy” the rules of which work to produce welfare. The fact that this experiential wisdom is deposited in custom renders it a sort of “common wisdom” or “collective reason” (what in Arabic we might call *'aql 'āmm*, or *'aql mushtarak*). Here again we have a strong sense of what I earlier called an Islamic “natural law”: the notion that God's creation, the human mind, and the Book of God, are all derived from and expressions of the same larger Truth—what we are now calling the Truth of the Pre-Text—whose customs are *diffused* in nature, humans and in the Book of God, and on the working basis of all of which Muslims must conduct and settle their affairs and rule on whatever matter is at hand.¹⁷⁸ At least this was

¹⁷⁷ *Kepūtusan 'ādat tiga perkara. Pertama 'ādat mansiyāng iya'-itu terjālī. Keduwa 'ādat tiyāng iya'-itu berkebūlatan. Ketiga 'ādat kitāb-Allah iya'-itu hukum Qur'ān*, Caldecott, “Jelebu Customary Songs and Sayings,” 26 (transliteration mine). Caldecott translates the first statement as “Custom may be split into three branches” which, in my assessment, has the confusing effect of producing the sense that the Rulings of God are a sub-division or “branch of *'ādat*” where *'ādat* is understood in its conventional sense as human custom, rather than conveying the sense that the rulings of God have their own custom—one might say they are “the Custom of God”—and are thus productive of values by which rulings are customarily made by men. M. B. Hooker, recognizing the problem, suggests to “replace the term ‘custom’ with some such phrase as ‘the concept’ of law has three branches,” M. B. Hooker, *Adat Laws in Modern Malaya: Land Tenure, Traditional Government and Religion*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972, 39. I have followed Caldecott (as well as Wilkinson's *Dictionary*) in translating *tiyāng* as “pillar” (its standard meaning in the Malayan peninsula) although, in the context, I was very tempted to understand *tiyāng* to mean “human being” (as in Javanese).

¹⁷⁸ M. B. Hooker observed of these two *perbilangans* that they “set out in a somewhat vague manner an ideal pattern of interaction between a religious law (Islam) and adat.” He remarks of

the conceptual case until 1951, when the Religious Affairs Section of the Rembau Branch of the United Malays National Organization declared aspects of ‘*ādat* inheritance law that had long been in legal application to be *harām*—that is, in violation of Islam. As Michael Peletz rightly points out, “the controversy illuminates the extent to which the spheres of *adat* and Islam had become . . . polarized by the middle of the twentieth century”;¹⁷⁹ that is, it illuminates the falling out of blood brothers—the modern estrangement of the historical kinship relation between the brothers of ‘*adat* and *hukum*. Prior to this intervention by the modern state, ‘*ādat* and *hukum syarak* were not conceptual and ontological poles, but were together the conceptual axis of Islam (we shall turn to the modern intervention at the end of this chapter).

To sum up: what I have been presenting here is the widespread existence in historical societies of Muslims of a notion of *Islamic* law which arises from hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, where *Islamic* law is conceptualized as an operation of goods and values and judgements obtained from the Pre-Text by the force of nature, by collective human reason and experience, and by reading of the Text, all present in social and discursive diffusion as Con-Text, and brought to bear by Muslims in the assessment and fulfillment of the interests of welfare in the particular time. This is a notion of Islamic law that is significantly different in configuration and operation from that which we are likely to obtain out of the concentrated study of works of *uṣūl al-fiqh* jurisprudence alone—which is precisely my point. To understand how historical societies of Muslims—rather than just Muslim *fuqahā*—jurisprudents—have conceived of law it is necessary to look beyond legal discourses to the *diffusion* of the concept of law and of values related to law in the larger discourses of society.



As an illustration of the proliferation and embeddedness in historical societies of Muslims of the foregoing concept of Islamic law, I should like here to offer

the first that it “attempts to express a distinction between two systems of law but at the same time makes one depend on the other,” concluding that “it says, in effect, that *adat* and religious normatives are interrelated and depend ultimately on a belief in (the Islamic conception of God,” and of the second that it “distinguishes a law of nature; but given the premises of belief in God, one must relate this law to religion since all things, including the law of nature, ultimately find their *fons et origo* in God,” M. B. Hooker, *Adat Laws in Modern Malaya: Land Tenure, Traditional Government and Religion*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972, 37, 39 and 47. Applying the concept of Pre-Text of Revelation clarifies the relationship of ‘*ādat* and *hukum*, both to each other and to Divine Truth.

¹⁷⁹ Peletz, *Social History and Evolution in the Interrelationship of Adat and Islam in Rembau*, 40.

a brief account and analysis of what is possibly the most famous “legal case” in Islamic history—that of the Qādī (Judge) of Hamadān, which was a case of Sultanic law. The “case” of the Qādī of Hamadān is a fiction. As anyone who has read the work in question will remember, it is narrated in a foundational text of the Balkans-to-Bengal *paideia*—a book that exemplified the function of what Talal Asad calls the “the formation of moral selves.” The book to which I refer is not a commentary on Qur’ān or Hadith, a legal text, or a creed; it is a work of fiction which was known, it may safely be said, to *every literate person* from the Balkans-to-Bengal over half-a-millennium—not least by virtue of the simple fact that it also functioned as the foundational text for the learning of good Persian prose (although the work was also translated into several languages)—and was recited orally to countless non-literate others. The *Gulistān* (*Rose-Garden*) of Sa‘dī of Shiraz (*fl.* 1281; the book was written in 1258, in the same decade as the *Akhlaq* of Tūsī), along with its companion volume, the *Bōstan* (*Scent-Garden*), is a short work of morals and ethics conveyed in brief narratives (punctuated by poetry and aphorisms, as well as by verses of the Qur’ān) wherein values and norms—indeed, an entire *ethos*—is synthesized and presented for contemplation under the rubric of the following chapter titles: “The Conduct of Kings,” “The Ethics of Dervishes,” “The Virtue of Contentment,” “The Benefits of Silence,” “Love and Youth,” “Weakness of Old Age,” “The Effects of Education,” “The Manners of Conversation and Companionship,”¹⁸⁰ “Justice, Opinion, and Managing World-Governance,” “Beneficence,” “Passionate Love,” “Humility,” “Acceptance,” “Contentment,” “Education,” “Gratitude,” “Repentance,” and “Talking with God.”¹⁸¹

It goes without saying that the ethos that is presented is regarded by both the author and his enormous audience as entirely in consonance with, indeed as expressive and elaborative of, what it means to live as a Muslim in society with other Muslims. Simply, this is the purpose of the book: to make Muslims aware of how to live in society. That the *Gulistān* and the *Bostān* have been conceived of by societies of Muslims as works of *Islamic ethics*—that are “about how we ought to live. What makes an action the right, rather than the wrong thing to do? What should our goals be?”¹⁸²—and that its author is understood by his historical audiences to be formulating and presenting *Islamic ethics* through literary fiction is neatly encapsulated in the colophon of an

¹⁸⁰ *sirat-i pādishāhān, akhlāq-i darvīshān, fażīlat-i qanā‘at, favā‘id-i khāmūshī, ‘ishq va javānī, za‘f-i pīrī, taśīr-i tarbiyat, ādāb-i ṣuhbat*: these are the chapters of the *Gulistān*.

¹⁸¹ ‘adl va rāy va tadbīr-i jahāndārī, iḥsān, ‘ishq, tavāzū‘, riḍā‘, qanā‘at, tarbiyat, shukr, tawbah, munājāt.

¹⁸² Peter Singer, “Introduction,” in Peter Singer (editor), *Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 3–13, at 3.

exquisite presentation copy of Sa‘dī’s *Dīvān* (complete works), prepared by a Kashmīrī scribe in 1686, that refers to Sa‘dī as “the most eloquent of the eloquent, the most savoured of poets, the Teacher of the Community and of *Dīn* (*Shaykh al-millah wa al-dīn*).”¹⁸³ The honorific title *Shaykh al-millah wa al-dīn* (typically contracted, in the standard mode by which he is [was] mentioned in the societies in which he is read, to *Shaykh-i Sa‘dī*) proclaims Sa‘dī’s universally acknowledged status as teacher to the Muslim community of their *dīn*—this in full cognizance of the fact that Sa‘dī (while he was a graduate of the great Nīzāmiyyah *madrasah* in Baghdad that had been founded by the Saljuq vizier Nīzām-ul-Mulk in 1065) was an author not of Qur’ānic exegesis or Hadith commentary, not of theology or jurisprudence, nor even of Sufi theory, but of *fiction*. That in his writing of fiction he, like Hāfiẓ, Rūmī, Nīzāmī, Ghālib, and other great representatives of the *adab* of Muslims, was conceived of as a recipient of the T/truth of the Unseen to the Seen is exquisitely summed up in the mid-sixteenth-century miniature painting in the copy of the *Haft Awrang* of Jāmī commissioned by the Safavid prince, Ibrāhīm Mirzā, that shows angels descending with trays of light to cast upon Sa‘dī as he composes a couplet (see Figure 9).¹⁸⁴

Further to his poetical fiction, Sa‘dī’s two works of prose fiction, the *Gulistān* and *Bōstān* are quite possibly the two most widely-read works of normative Islamic ethics of all time. The most recent translator of the *Gulistān* says:

Sa‘dī’s *Gulistan* must be one of the most widely read books ever produced. Almost from the time it was written it was the first book studied by school children throughout the entire Persian-speaking and -reading world—from Constantinople to Bengal and from Central Asia to East Africa.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ See MS Montréal, McGill University Islamic Studies Library 178, a *Dīvān* of Sa‘dī copied in 1087/1696 by one Durr Allāh Kashmīrī for his patron, Khwājagī Khwājah Hājjī Muhammad Bāndī; see Adam Gacek, *Persian Manuscripts in the Libraries of McGill University*, Montréal: McGill University Libraries, 2005, 25. For an image of the colophon, see Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademeum for Readers*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012, 166, (Figure 117).

¹⁸⁴ For a study of this painting, see Marianna Shreve Simpson (with contributions by Massumeh Farhad), *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Awrang: A Princely Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran*, Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1997, 149–151. For another miniature painting depicting the same scene, see the reproduction from the illustrated Cairo manuscript of Jāmī’s *Subḥat al-abrār* in Okasha, *The Muslim Painter and the Divine*, 141 (Plate 28).

¹⁸⁵ Wheeler M. Thackston (translator), *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa‘dī: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*, Bethesda: Ibex, 2008, iv. An indication of the continuing importance of the book can be gauged from the fact that the Widener Library (Harvard University) alone owns some twenty-five different nineteenth-century editions of the *Gulistān* printed



FIGURE 9. Miniature painted between 1556 and 1565 for the copy of the *Haft Awrang* of Jāmī commissioned by the Safavid prince Ibrāhīm Mīrzā, illustrating angels bringing bowls of light to inspire Sa'dī of Shiraz as he composes a couplet (Courtesy, the Freer Gallery of Art and the Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC [FGA 146.12 f. 147a]).

The story of the Qādī of Hamadān appears in the chapter of the *Gulistān* on “Love and Youth.” For those readers unfamiliar with the story, I will present it here in summary, mainly in my own words, but also sometimes in Sa'dī’s—very much, one might say, in the manner that the story might have been

in Cairo, Istanbul, Tehran, Lucknow, Calcutta, Bombay, Kanpur, Lahore, Aligarh, and Delhi (the collection is more representative of South Asia than of other regions owing to the aforementioned project I have undertaken since 2008 of collecting early Indian printed books for the library). There are also early printed translations into Ottoman, Arabic, Urdu, and Panjabi.

narrated to largely illiterate audiences down the centuries in various social settings. The story goes thus (any phrase in full quotation marks, or for which I provide a Persian transliteration is a direct quotation from Sa‘dī; also, any direct speech in single quotation marks is a paraphrase of direct speech in Sa‘dī).

The Qadi of Hamadān fell madly in love with a blacksmith’s boy “as tall as a cypress.”¹⁸⁶ The boy rebuffed his advances in the street with insults and stones. The Qadi’s friends and retainers learned what had happened and, concerned for the reputation of the honourable judge and of his high office, urged him to “roll up the carpet of inflamed desire.”¹⁸⁷ The Qadi agreed that their advice was correct and “in the interest of welfare in the situation [*maṣlahat-i hāl*],”¹⁸⁸ but said he simply could not help himself—“the horse-shoe of his heart was in the fire” and there was nothing to be done about it: “You can’t wash the black off an African.” Anyway, the short of it is that the boy eventually relented and the Qādī finally managed to spend a night alone with him, which he passed, in Sa‘dī’s puckish rhyming phrase, *sharāb dar sar va shabāb dar bar*, “with wine in his head, and the youth in his arm.”¹⁸⁹ Of this blissful moment, Sa‘dī interpolates:

Perhaps this night the cockerel will not crow upon its hour:
The lovers are not done with embraces and kisses!¹⁹⁰

Alas for the Qādī, someone informed the *muhtasib* (the official responsible for the regulation of market transactions, and for public morality) of these goings-on and word was swiftly passed to the King of the “wrong-doing [*munkar*] taking place.”¹⁹¹ The King could not believe his ears that such could be true of someone whom “I know to be one of the most distinguished personages of the age”,¹⁹² and suspecting that the Qādī was being slandered, went personally to the Qādī’s bedchamber to ascertain the truth for his royal self. The scene that presented itself there is vividly portrayed by Sa‘dī in one

¹⁸⁶ *sarv-i buland*, Sharaf-ud-Din Muṣliḥ Sa‘dī Shīrāzī, *Gulistān*, (with Urdu translation and commentary by Sajjād Ḥusayn), Multan: Fārūqī Kutubkhānah, n.d., (reprint of a 1920 edition), 186.

¹⁸⁷ *farsh-e vala‘ darnavardī*, Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 187; I could not, here, improve on the translation of Thackston, *Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa‘dī*, 120.

¹⁸⁸ Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 187 (here, and elsewhere, compare the translation of Thackston).

¹⁸⁹ Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 188.

¹⁹⁰ *imshab magar bi-vaqt namikhwānad īn khurūs / ‘ushshāq bas nakardah hanūz az kinār o būs*, Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 188.

¹⁹¹ Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 189.

¹⁹² Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 189.

of his most memorable lines of rhyming prose: “a candle standing, a witness-of-Divine-Beauty sitting, wine spilled, goblets broken, and the Qādī in a drunken dream oblivious to the world of being [*sham’ istādah va shāhid ni-shastah va may rīkhtah va qadah shikastah va qāzī dar khwāb-i mastī bī-khabar az mulk-i hastī*.]”¹⁹³ Very gently (as Sa‘dī expressly tells us), the King roused the Qādī from his stupor. Awake, the Qādī immediately grasped the peril of the situation and exclaimed: “From which direction did the sun rise?” “From the east,” answered the King. “God be praised!” cried the Qādī, “for then, in accordance with the Hadith: *The doors of repentance are not locked upon my servants until the sun rises in the West*,¹⁹⁴ I seek your forgiveness, O God, and I repent to you!”¹⁹⁵ ‘Hang on a minute!’ said the King, ‘Now that you know you’re done for, it’s too late for you to repent! Have you forgotten that the Qur’ān says: *But their faith after they beheld our punishment availed them naught?*’ (This is the verse in the Qur’ān that follows on from God’s words *And when they saw Our punishment they said, ‘We believe in God, alone, and reject that in which we used to associate.’ But their faith after they beheld our punishment availed them naught: this is the way of God which is established for his bondsmen.*)¹⁹⁶ The Qādī clasped the hem of the King’s gown and pleaded for mercy. “No!” said the King, “it is impossible in reason and is against the *shari‘ah* [*muḥāl-i ‘aql-ast va khilāf-i shar’*] (in another recension: “impossible in reason, and against that which has been transmitted [*muḥāl-i ‘aql-ast va khilāf-i naql*])¹⁹⁷ for you to be released from the grip of my punishment on the basis of your knowledge and eloquence. Rather, I deem it in the interest of welfare [*maṣlahat*] that I have you thrown off the walls of my fortress so that others are admonished [*naṣīhat pazīrand*] and learn a lesson [*‘ibrat gīrand*] thereby.”¹⁹⁸ ‘Sovereign of the World!’ said the Qādī, ‘but, in that case,

¹⁹³ Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 190.

¹⁹⁴ *lā yughlaq bāb al-tawbah ‘alā al-‘ibād ḥattā taṭla‘ al-shams min maghribi-hā*; the whole statement does not appear in the sources as a Hadith, but it is a rephrasing of the various Hadiths that convey the idea that the opportunity for repentance does not end “until the sun rises in the West (*hattā taṭla‘ al-shams min maghribi-hā*) which appears in various forms in several Hadith collections, including Muslim, *Sahīh*, 8:100, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 3:2 (*lā tanqati ‘al-tawbah ḥattā taṭla‘ al-shams min maghribi-hā*), ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Dārimī (d. 869), *Sunan al-Dārimī* (edited by Aḥmad Dahmān), Damascus: Maṭba‘at al-I’tidāl, n.d., 2:240, and scattered through the *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Ḥanbal (see Wensinck, *Concordance et Indices*, 4: 475).

¹⁹⁵ Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 190.

¹⁹⁶ *fa-lammā ra’aw ba’sa-nā qālū āmannā bi-Allāhi waḥda-hū wa kafarnā bi-mā kunnā bi-hi mushrikīna / fa-lam yaku yanfa‘u-hum īmānu-hum lammā ra’aw ba’sa-nā sunnat Allāhi allatī qad khalat fi ‘ibādi-hi*, Qur’ān 40:84–85 al-Ghāfir.

¹⁹⁷ Thackston’s edition has *muḥāl-i ‘aql-ast va khilāf-i shar’*. Thackston, *Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa‘dī*, 122; the text of Sajjād Ḥusayn’s edition reads *muḥāl-i ‘aql-ast va khilāf-i naql*, Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 191.

¹⁹⁸ Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 191.

there are many people in your kingdom who have committed the same offence as I. Perhaps you could take one of them and throw *him* off the fortress walls: I would most certainly learn my lesson from observing his fate!¹⁹⁹ Upon this, the King could not help himself and burst out laughing. ‘All right,’ he said, ‘release this fellow!’ Some of the courtiers protested the decision, but to them the King said:

You all carry your own faults:
Do not accuse the faults of others!¹⁹⁹

There are several salient points to be made from the story of the Qādī of Hamadān. The first is that we should be in no doubt that this is a story about law: it is about *what law is, what law is for, and what values should accompany and inform the constitution and application of law*. The main protagonists are the two highest judicial authorities in the “excellent city” of Muslims: the Qādī, and the Sultan (and it is well worth noting here that Sa‘dī wrote both the *Gulistān* and the *Bōstan* under the patronage and for the instruction of a ruler, the Atabeg of Fars, *Qutluğ Khān Abū Bakr b. Sa‘d al-Zangī*, r. 1226–1260, to whom the works are expressly addressed and dedicated). The story is about a transgression of law: the Qādī succumbs to human weakness, spends the night (drunk) in the arms of his lover-boy, and is caught *in flagrante delicto* by the Sultan—in a scene that was to become something of a favourite of miniature painters and their audiences (see Figure 10, from a Mughal-owned manuscript of the *Gulistān*; and Figure 11,²⁰⁰ from an Ottoman manuscript of the *Gulistān*). The Sultan intervenes to judge the Qādī according to his own discretion—by ruler’s law or *siyāsat*. In making his judgement, the Sultan first weighs up the legal *dicta* of Qur’ān and Hadith, and states clearly to the Qādī that, on the basis of the Qur’ānic verse *their faith after they beheld our punishment availed them naught*, “it is impossible in reason, and against the *shari‘at* [in another version, “impossible in reason, and against received knowledge”] for me to set you free.” The Sultan further invokes the principle of *maṣlahah*

¹⁹⁹ *hamah ḥammāl-i ‘ayb-i khwīṣhtanīd / ṭa‘nah bar ‘ayb-i dīgarān mazanīd*, Sa‘dī, *Gulistān*, 191.

²⁰⁰ For a further two vivid seventeenth-century Mughal miniatures illustrating this scene see the painting reproduced and described by Robert Skelton, “South Asia,” in Steven Hooper (editor), *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. Volume III. Precolumbian, Asian, Egyptian and European Antiquities*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, 230–279, at 246–247; and the painting reproduced in Joseph M. Dye III, “Payag,” in Pratapaditya Pal (editor), *Master Artists of the Imperial Mughal Court*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1991, 119–134, at 133 (this painting was, at the time that this image was published, in the collection of Hashem Khosrovani; I am uncertain as to its current whereabouts).

in deciding to make an example of the Qādī, so that others might learn a lesson. Yet, when the Qādī retorts that if the object of the exercise is the learning of a lesson, then the Sultan might as well execute someone else guilty of the same offense (as a result of which the Qādī will also duly learn his lesson) the Sultan laughs, changes his mind, and sets the Qādī free. We might think that the Sultan is here acting on a whim—but he is not. Rather, we should remember the principle stated by the scholar of melancholy cited in Chapter 5: “Laughter is produced by the rational soul . . . Its end is the awareness of the soul, when laughing, of the *meaning* of its laughter by gaining clarity about its *purpose* as either humorous or serious.”²⁰¹ The Sultan’s laughter gives him clarity about the *meaning* of the situation, about where *maṣlahah* lies in the present circumstance, and as to what the *purpose* (*maqṣad*) of the law here is. The ruler’s function, let us recall, is to “keep watch over the health of the temper of the world”—what Tūsī and Davvānī called “Real-True Equilibrium” [*i'tidāl-i haqiqī*]—“such that when it deviates from this path, he must return it to the balance.” Here, the ruler decides that the interests of welfare in this situation (*maṣlahat-i vaqt*) will be served not by executing the Qādī, but by showing clemency: the lesson has been learned, equilibrium preserved, and thus the *maqṣad* (purpose) of law fulfilled—which, as we have seen, is good textbook *siyāsat* (even if it may not be good textbook *fīqh*). And for those who think that law is simply textbook crime and punishment the ruler issues the reminder: “You all carry your own faults; do not accuse the faults of others.”

Sa‘di makes no declaration at the end of the story as to whether or not he agrees with the Sultan. Whether or not the Sultan has done the right thing is a question that the “Teacher of the Community and of *Dīn*” leaves to the consideration of his audience. Indeed, one can readily imagine a circumstance in a classroom or a coffeeshop where this story is narrated, and the question thrown to the audience: Was the Sultan right? On what basis do we, the Muslim audience, think the Sultan should make his legal ruling in this case? What considerations and *values* should he bring to bear in making his *legal* decision? The Muslim audience of the *Gulistān* might even recall that Sa‘di begins the second chapter of his book with a story that culminates in the forceful assertion of the axiom “What business does the *muḥtasib* have inside a house?”²⁰² Is this argument for the differential status of private space a value to be brought to bear upon the present legal case? What moral lesson (*‘ibrat*) should we draw from the story? Implicated in our valorization and judgement of the Qādī’s crime and punishment is *our construction and valorization of*

²⁰¹ Rosenthal, *Humor in Early Islam*, 134–135 (italics mine).

²⁰² *muḥtasib rā darūn-i khānah chih kār?* Sa‘di, *Gulistān*, 80–81.

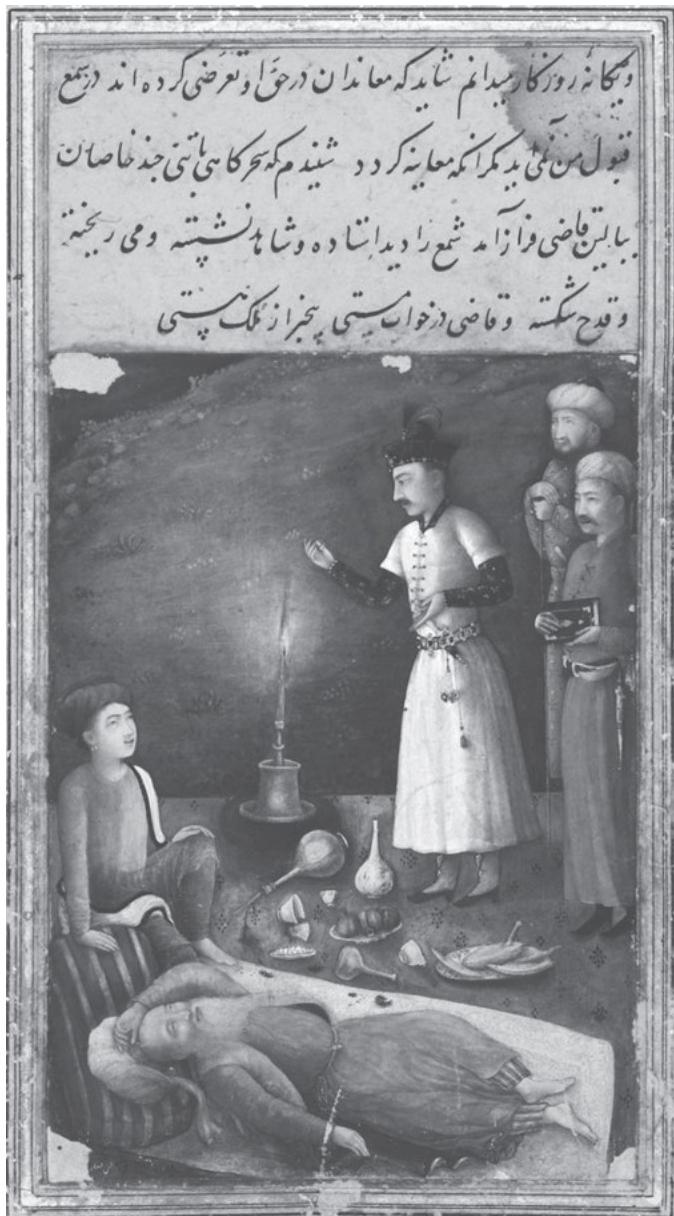


FIGURE 10. Miniature painted in India circa 1645 by Lalchand, illustrating the scene from the “story of the Qādī of Hamadān” in the *Gulistān* of Sa’di depicting the accompanying text: “a candle standing, a witness-of-Divine-Beauty sitting, wine spilled, goblets broken, and the Qādī in a drunken dream oblivious to the world of being” (Courtesy, the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of the Art and History Trust in honour of Ezzat-Malek Soudavar [F1998.5.74]).

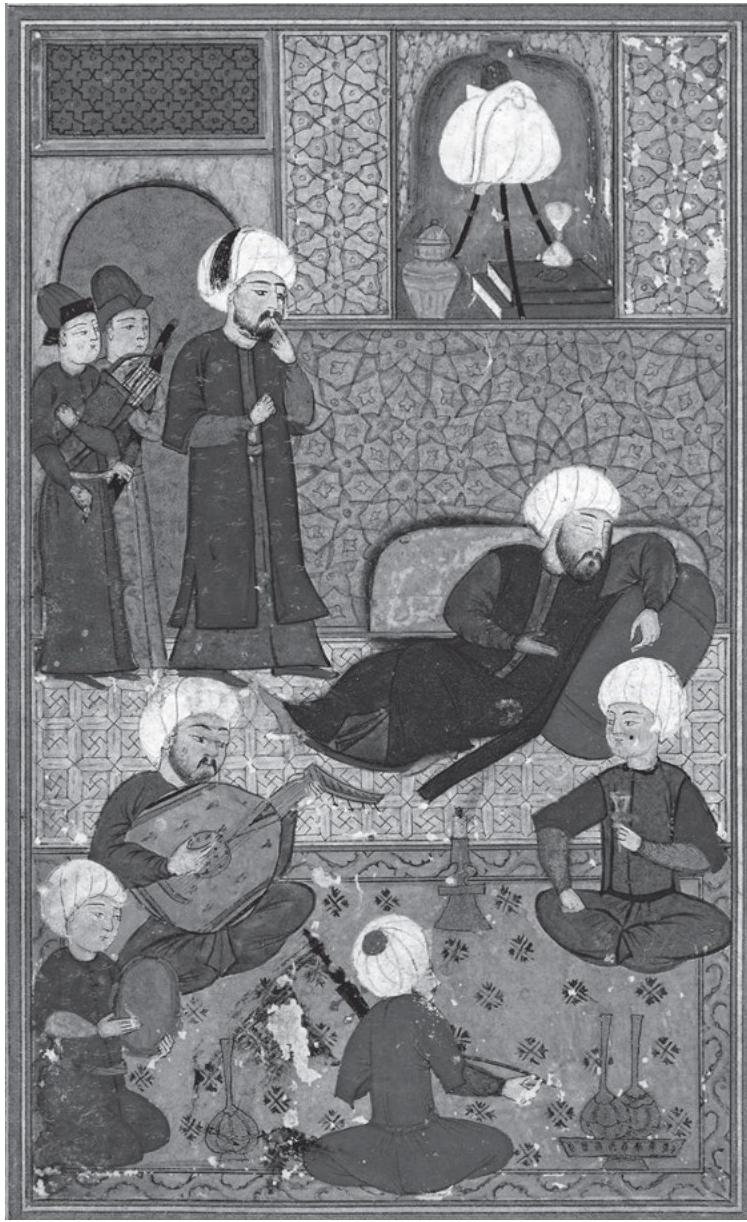


FIGURE 11. Miniature painted under Ottoman patronage *circa* 1565, illustrating the same scene from the story of the Qādī of Hamadān in the *Gulistān* of Sa'di as in Figure 10 (Courtesy, the Freer Gallery of Art and the Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC [F1949.2 f. 110a]).

the human being. How we valorize the Qādī's transgression—that is, how we valorize the human act—is tied to and arises out of how we valorize the human being. What *values* do we bring into play—do we admit into evidence—in our judgement of the human being? Is the Qādī's act something to be unequivocally valorized in “black and white” (to invoke Bīdil's characterization of this mode of thinking)²⁰³ terms of the forensic legal categories of “prohibited and permitted” (*halāl wa ḥarām*), as a transgression squarely to be punished—or do we, in this case, take into account the lines of Hāfiẓ cited in Chapter 1: “If the cruelty and infidelity of the beloved are not taken into the reckoning: What means the Grace and Mercy of God? What is there?” On what basis here should the ruler rule—what is government in accordance with Divine purpose? What is the place of tolerance—for human weakness and for human difference—and of *mercy* (the divine attribute invoked twice as the beginning of each chapter of the Qur'ān) in the assessment of human action? Is the judge-ruler/ruler-judge justified here in invoking the lines, “You all carry your own faults: Do not accuse the faults of others!”? Is he justified here in disregarding the implication of the Qur'ānic *dictum*, “*But their faith after they beheld our punishment availed them naught*”? How should the twin brothers of *siyāsah* and *dīn* act here? By pardoning the Qādī, has the ruler violated the universal principles of the *shari'ah*: *dīn*, life, intellect, family, property and honour—or has he upheld them? Is the ruler following Ibn Qutaybah's prescription of using “noble ethics” and “temperate politics” for the “welfare of the time” and “the welfare of *dīn*”? By not executing the Qādī, has he restored the “Real-True Equilibrium” [*i'tidāl-i haqīqī*] of which Tūsī and Davvānī speak? Or would he, in fact, have restored Equilibrium had he executed the Qādī? Has he maintained the harmonious balance by which (the Malay *perbilangan* tells us) the wisdom of custom is hinged to the wisdom of Text? Has the Sultan effected good *siyāsat*—that is, good Sultanic law, good judgement, good management, good policy—or not; for, as Sa'dī tells us elsewhere in the *Gulistān*, “Three things do not last: wealth without trade, knowledge without debate, and a kingdom without *siyāsat*,”²⁰⁴ which is all another way of asking, “has the Sultan done *what God wants?*” The questions that are here left open for the audience are precisely these: *What is law? What is justice?*

²⁰³ See Chapter 5.

²⁰⁴ *sih chīz pāydār namānad māl bī tijārat va 'ilm bī bahs va mulk bī siyāsat*, Sa'dī, *Gulistān*, 232. Thackston here renders *siyāsat* as “punishment,” which is an error worth correcting; Thackston, *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di*, 149. Sajjād Husayn renders it correctly in Urdu as *tadbīr* (management), the very quality that we have seen the *akhlāq* texts positing as definitive of the good ruler.

These are the very questions that the conceptualization of Islamic law which is dominant today—and which focuses pretty much exclusively on *fiqh*-jurisprudence—assumes may be answered *Islamically* only by the *fuqaha'*-jurisprudents on the basis of *fiqh*-jurisprudential sources. But the philosopher Davvānī expressly and representatively insisted otherwise in his widely-read book on *akhlāq*-ethics: “Co-existence in justice [*mu‘āvanat bar vajh-i ‘adālat*] is only to be realized when we know what the principle of justice [*qā‘idah-i ‘adālat*] is—and knowledge of this is obtainable only by knowledge of the principles of *this* science [i.e., *akhlāq*-ethics]; so it is necessary that every person study *this* science.”²⁰⁵ The story of the Qādī of Hamadān tells us that the human and historical conversation about and conceptualization of law in societies of Muslims is much broader in scope than we have become accustomed to think. That conversation, that hermeneutical engagement is expressed not solely in *fiqh* discourses, but in the discourses of philosophy and Sufism, and in the fiction of poetry and prose. The story invites its audience, whether they be successive generations of Muslims or the contemporary academic scholar of Islam, to consider *where the Truth lies*; and, in doing so, it invites us to bring to bear on the truth a whole slew of considerations of value from sources *beyond the Text*—from Pre-Text, and Con-Text—that are in social and discursive diffusion as *Islamic legal values*, that is, as part and parcel of *Islamic law*. This construction of Islamic law makes the *sharī‘ah* itself a very different thing to what it is when conceived of dominantly as a hermeneutics of Text.²⁰⁶

The fact of the historical existence of a widespread and operational paradigm of Islamic law that comprises ruler’s law as a fully enfranchised and central component—that is, a paradigm that conceptualizes ruler’s law *as* Is-

²⁰⁵ Davvānī, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, 224 (compare the translation of Thompson, *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People*, 328). For an instance of the Mughal emperor Bābur presenting a story about his father’s decision-making as a ruler in a manner that “bears a striking resemblance to one of Sa‘di’s moral lessons,” see Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004, 179. Bābur was, as one would only expect, thoroughly familiar with the *Gulistān* and the *Bostān*, and cited them in his memoirs.

²⁰⁶ In an important monograph that argues for the prominence of an *akhlāq*- and Sufism-based Islam in the context of Mughal India, Muzaffar Alam says: “The *shari‘a* here connotes . . . something other than the jurist’s notion of strict Islamic law . . . The term *shari‘a*, in such treatises, does not then imply the same as in works of jurisprudence . . . The imprint of *akhlāq* literature is unmistakable also in discourses on justice, *i‘tidāl*, harmony, *siyāsat*, reason and religion . . . It is clear that the *shari‘a* which guided the Mughal pattern of governance bore the impact of the tradition of Nasirean *akhlāq*, this being reinforced by the world that the poets and Sufis had in their own domain delineated in Persian, a world in which it became possible to use the term *shari‘a* not necessarily merely in its narrow legalistic sense,” Alam, “*Shari‘a, Akhlāq and Governance*,” 55, 60–61, 61, and 77.

lamic law—and in which the Truth of the Pre-Text of Revelation is available in the Con-Text of social and discursive *diffusion* for access and mobilization in the interests of welfare in the here-and-now is, at the very least, a highly suggestive one for Muslims today, given that the primary issue in modern Muslim thought has been that of the reform of Islamic law. It is further instructive given that the most radical instrument for the modernist reform of law has been the prioritization of the concept of *maṣlahah*-welfare. The far-reaching implications of the prioritization of *maṣlahah* for the conceptualization of law has led to various legal reformers seizing upon the “*maqṣad-maṣlahah* model of practical reasoning as offering an important mechanism for changing and developing the Sharī‘a in a manner that reflects the lived experience of modern Muslims.”²⁰⁷ Exemplarily of this trend, one of the leading contemporary reformist scholars of Sunni Islamic law, Khaled Abou El Fadl, “elides the Sharī‘a with the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘a* in order to marginalize the authority of *fiqh*.”²⁰⁸ One of the most famous and seminal such instances, that of the early twentieth-century Egyptian reformer, Muḥammad Rashīd Ridā (1865–1935), has been characterized as follows:

Ridā’s *maqāṣid* would be progressively reduced to an induction whose subject-matter is the state’s *tashri‘*, a word that Ridā understood as belonging to the realm of positive legislation . . . Ridā’s anchoring of all law . . . in the otherwise limited concept of necessity, which is in turn validated by the principle of *maṣlaḥa*, amounts, in the final analysis, to a total negation of traditional legal theory. In effect he draws extensively on a minor concept, of highly limited application, in order to suppress the rest of it. Any revealed text . . . could be set aside if it were to contravene these considerations. Aside from matters of worship and religious ritual, which he insists are to remain within the parameters of revelation, Ridā upholds a legal theory strictly anchored in natural law, where considerations of human need, interest and necessity would reign supreme in elaborating a legal corpus . . . His, then, is a theory that constitutes a radical shift from the traditional Sharī‘a, which had a long history of accommodating itself to changing social needs without allowing itself to abandon its hermeneutical ties to revelation.²⁰⁹

My point here is not to *equate* historical ruler’s law with modern *maṣlahah*-oriented reform. Rather, it is to suggest that the project of modern reformers

²⁰⁷ Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories*, 194–195.

²⁰⁸ Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories*, 188.

²⁰⁹ Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharī‘a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 507–508.

may not, in fact, be anything like as historically radical as the distinguished author of the above passage imagines—and may, in fact, have historical correspondences and precedents quite different to those that the modern reformers themselves imagine.²¹⁰ It may be that, when viewed from the perspective of the history of law-making by *uṣūl al-fiqh*-jurisprudence, *maṣlahah* appears as a “minor concept, of highly limited application.” But *maṣlahah* is a decidedly *major* concept of markedly broad application in the history of law-making by Muslim rulers and elites thinking and valorizing in expansive terms of the full textual and praxial range of the normative *paideia* of their societies. Historians of Islamic law and modern Muslim legal reformers, alike, invariably look for linkages between reformist legal thought and elements in the historical juridical discourse. Modern reformist tracts routinely invoke *maṣlahah* and the *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* as crucial to the reform of the law—but hardly any of their authors (and nor, for that matter, hardly any legal historians) conceive that the meaning of the Islamic values of *dīn*, life, intellect, family, property and honour might, historically, have been expressed normatively in, and might today retrospectively be sought and found in, projects such as philosophy, Sufism, art, and fictional literature. Recognizing the philosophical-ethical conceptualization of ruler’s law as Islamic law should significantly affect and influence the conceptualization by modern Muslims of the norms and values of the project of the law as diffused, performed and reiterated in the broader discourses and practices of society. The philosophical-ethical conceptualization of *ruler’s law as Islamic law* arises from a broader conceptualization of Revelation in which to give priority to reason over the letter of the Text is precisely *not* to “abandon hermeneutical ties to revelation”; it is rather to seek the Revelation of the Truth of the Pre-Text in primary sources beside and beyond the Text.



By conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muḥammad as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, and thereby alerting ourselves to the fact and consequences for Truth of the structure and spatiality of Revelation, we become more readily able to bring into our analytic focus certain definitive features of contradiction in/as Islam. We become more able to understand why *those particular types of contradiction* are endemic across an

²¹⁰ For an insightful treatment of the idea of *maṣlahah* in the early discourses of Islamic modernity, see Dyala Hamzah, “From ‘ilm to Ṣihāfa or the politics of the public interest (*maṣlahah*): Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā and his journal *al-Manār* (1898–1935),” in Dyala Hamzah (editor), *The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood*, New York: Routledge, 2013, 90–127.

otherwise dizzyingly diverse historical array of societies of Muslims; that is to say, why it is that the same sorts of contradictions exist in a large number of diverse locales—to the point where we might call these *unifying contradictions of Islam*.

Pre-eminent among these is the tension—everpresent as potential contradiction—inherent to the spatiality of Revelation, between *Islam as principle or meaning* and *Islam as form*. This tension expresses itself routinely and universally in societies of Muslims in the chronic question of whether (and to what extent) Islam/God's Truth resides and obtains in *meanings and values* which may legitimately find truthful and valid expression *in any form that retains, enacts or conveys those principles and values*; or whether (and to what extent) Islam/God's Truth resides and obtains in *specific, delimited, forms which are the only true and legitimate expressions of the Truth/Islam*. It is this tension between Islam as consisting in underlying (Unseen/unstated) meanings and values and Islam as consisting in overlying (Seen/stated) specific forms that lies at the crux of most inter-Muslim disagreements over “What is Islam?”

If one takes the view—as do the discourses of philosophy and Sufism—that Islam consists in underlying/Unseen/unstated/Pre-Textual general meanings/Truth that may meaningfully be instantiated in a diverse range of forms, then Islam is a potentially *prolific plurality* of valid beliefs and practices that cohere to and express certain general principles. If one takes the view—as does the discourse of Law, and most especially the discourse of Hadith—that Islam consists in overlying/Seen/stated/Textual specific forms and may thus not take other forms, then Islam is a *singularity* (or, at most, a much more *limited plurality*) of valid belief and practice; the meaning of Islam is *those specific forms* and no others. Since, as I have now pointed out more than once, all these hermeneutical engagements—philosophy, Sufism, law, Hadith, *etcetera*—exist in social and discursive *diffusion* rather than in compartmentalization, and are potentially available at all times to Muslims as Con-Text, all Muslims must in some measure negotiate for themselves, in their own hermeneutical engagement, the dialectic between (general) meaning and (specific) form, to arrive at the degree of formalism or non-formalism that, for them, constitutes Islam. All Muslims—and all societies of Muslims—must, in other words, negotiate for themselves what I earlier called, with Kātib Çelebī, *The Balance of Truth*.

To give just one especially chronic example of the enactment in societies of Muslims of this tension between meaning and form: are the various Sufi *dhikrs* (ritualized “Remembrance” of God, such as the whirling of Mevlevi Sufis, the singing of the Chishtis, the mortification of the flesh of the Rifā‘is, etc.) also valid and true *forms* in which Muslims may enact and fulfil the

meaning of the general principle of worshipful engagement with God—that is to say, are these plural forms valid expressions of the general principle of the Truth of Islam? The dispute over the validity of Sufi *dhikr* (in its various forms) is, of course, one of the oldest ongoing debates in the history of Muslims (it is precisely one of those problems of which Kātib Çelebī wrote that “the intelligent man will not be so stupid as to hope to decide a dispute of such long standing”).²¹¹ My point is that this dispute—and the underlying dynamic of meaning—versus-form whence it arises—is the direct consequence of the hermeneutical engagement with the spatial structure of Revelation. Thus, the one hermeneutical engagement with Revelation seeks to *restrict* the meaning of Islam to the enactment of the form located (by the reader) in the Text, while the other hermeneutical engagement with Revelation seeks to *extend* the meaning of Islam to the enactments of the principle located (by the reader) in the Pre-Text. The one hermeneutical engagement takes the position that there is no further Truth of the Pre-Text to be had beyond the Text and thus that any putative enactments of Truth other than those of the Text are invalid non-Textual innovations (*bida'*; singular, *bid'ah*), while the other hermeneutical engagement takes the position that the further Truth of the Pre-Text may perfectly be had directly from the Pre-Text, and thus that other enactments of the Truth of the Pre-Text are valid—indeed, in the case of Sufi *dhikr*, these other forms are themselves *means by which to access the Truth of the Pre-Text*.

The specificist or *restrictivist* position is exemplified in the discourse of the Textual project of Hadith, the express purpose of whose proponents has been to identify, specify, and prescribe a delimited set of creedal, praxial, and legal forms and norms as exclusively Islamic—and thus to eliminate other creedal, praxial and legal forms and norms as un-Islamic. The Hadith project represents a historical attempt on the part of its protagonists—a movement of successive generations of scholars in the early centuries of Islam known as the “Hadith folk” (*ahl al-hadith*)—to domesticate the potentially unruly plurality and multivocality, not only of those claiming to access directly the Truth of the Pre-Text, but also of those producing multiple and differing interpretations of the Truth of the Text. Much of Hadith began, as the historical resistance to it in societies of Muslims demonstrates, as Con-Text: opponents rejected the attribution of the Hadith texts to Muhammad, and accused the members of the Hadith movement as having generated these texts themselves, as the product of their own hermeneutic activity.²¹² The Hadith move-

²¹¹ Kātib Çelebī, *Balance of Truth*, 41.

²¹² See footnote 24 in Chapter 4.

ment overcame considerable early resistance to its precisan project of pinning down *specific* and *delimited prescriptive norms* on the authority of the Prophet Muḥammad himself²¹³ and, by the fifth century of Islamic history, eventually succeeded considerably in obtaining widespread acceptance of the specific, normative Con-Texts of its textual corpus as *Text* alongside the Qur’ān.²¹⁴ Crucially, the epistemology of the Hadith movement was taken up by the prescriptive project of Islamic law, in the methodology of which Hadith became, formally, the second Textual source of law alongside the Qur’ān.

The *expansivist* position²¹⁵ is exemplified in the Pre-Textual projects of philosophy and Sufism which have precisely sought not to restrict Truth to Text or to specific readings of Text (Sufi readings of the Qur’ān tend to be semantically expansive rather than restrictive) or specific forms. The *locus classicus* for this position of a plurality of valid truth-forms is probably the famous lines of the “Greatest Shaykh,” Ibn ‘Arabī, in his collection of poems entitled the *Interpreter of Desires* (*Tarjumān al-ashwāq*):

My heart is become receptive of every form:
So: a pasture for gazelles, a monastery for Christian monks,

²¹³ A sense of the prescriptive and precisan nature and scope of the Hadith project may be obtained from a survey of the chapter headings of a representative Hadith collection, the canonical *Sunan* of al-Nasā’i: ritual purity, water, menstruation, bathing and cleansing without water, prayer, appointed times, the call to prayer, mosques, the direction of prayer, the office of Imām, the beginning of the prayer, the execution of the prayer, forgetfulness in prayer, Friday prayer, shortening the prayer in travel, the eclipse prayer, prayer for rain, prayer of fear, the prayer of the two Īds, staying up at night and giving up the day to pray, funerals, fasting, alms-giving, the rituals of the Pilgrimage, struggle in the cause of God, marriage, divorce, horses, *mortmain*, bequests, gifts, conditional gifts, lifetime gifts, oaths and vows, sharecropping, prohibition of bloodshed, the division of land that passes into the possession of the Muslim community, pledging allegiance, sacrifice for new born children, sacrifice of the first born camel foal, and of a sheep in Rajab, hunting and slaughtering, sacrificial animals, sales, compurgation, cutting the hand of the thief, faith, adornment, the conduct of judges, seeking refuge in God, and drinks. I have taken this from Shahab Ahmed, “Hadith (i. A General Introduction),” in Ehsan Yarshater (editor), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, continued by New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, continued by New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1982-, 11:442–447, at 443–444.

²¹⁴ See Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni ḥadīth Canon*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007.

²¹⁵ The terms “expansion” and “contraction” are central to the famous reformist essay of ‘Abd-ul-Karīm Surūsh, *Qabz va bast-i tī’urik-i sharī’at: nazariyah-i takāmul-i ma’rifat-i dīnī* [The Contraction and Expansion of the Theory of Sharī’at: A Theory of the Development of Religious Knowledge], Tehran: Mu’assasah-i Farhangī-yi Sirāt, 1994 (3rd revised edition). However, Ashk Dalén makes a fair assessment in saying that “Sorouš presents no systematic clarification of the terms *qabd* and *bast* in the sense of a conceptual analysis which would provide his terminology with a theoretical *raison d’être*. He instead considers the theory of contraction and expansion of religious knowledge as the mechanism behind the alternating moments of epistemic openness and closure of religious knowledge in general terms,” Ashk Dalén, *Islamic Law, Epistemology and Modernity: Legal Philosophy in Contemporary Iran*, New York: Routledge, 2003, 254.

A temple for idols, the Ka'bah of the circumambulating pilgrim,
 The tablet of Torah, the leaves of Qur'an;
 I follow the *dīn* of love. Wheresover may turn
 Its riding-camels: the *dīn* there is my *dīn*, and my Faith.²¹⁶

Indeed, the proponents of this latter position may well go so far as to take the view that their alternative forms of enactment of Pre-Textual meaning are more than sufficient to the *meaningful purposes* of the Truth of Revelation, and may simply substitute their alternative derived forms for the majoritarian prescribed ones. For example, Mervyn Hiskett notes in a highly suggestive article on a widespread twentieth-century Sufi movement in West Africa, a branch of the great sub-Saharan Sufi order of the Tijāniyyah, self-nominated (in direct etymological descent from the Akbarian “new language”) as the “Community of the Flood” or “Community of Overflowing Grace” (*Jamā‘at al-Faydah*) whose members number in the millions: “One tendency among some members of the *Jamā‘a* has been to neglect or omit altogether the orthodox requirement of the five daily *ṣalāt*, the ritual prayers of Islam; instead they perform the remembrance [i.e., the ritual *dhikr*] and the *wird* [recitation of a prayer-text authored by a founder of the Sufi order].”²¹⁷ These members of the Community of Grace-Emanation are similar to various other groups down the centuries, such as the thirteen groups described in eighteenth-

²¹⁶ *la-qad ṣāra qalb-ī qābilan kulla ṣūratīn / fa mar‘ā li-ghuzlānin wa dīrun li-ruhbāni // wa baytun li-awthānin wa ka‘batu tā‘ifin / wa alwāhu tawrātin wa muṣḥafu qur‘āni // adīnu bi-dīni l-ḥubbi annā tawajjahat / rakā‘ibu-hu fa-d-dīnū dīn-ī wa īmān-ī*; see the Arabic text and compare the translation in Martin Lings, *Sufi Poems*, 62–63.

²¹⁷ Hiskett “attempts to trace the rise of . . . the *Jamā‘at al-fayda*, and to describe its doctrines and importance; then to describe its opponents, the Wahhābi *munkirūn*, ‘rejecters’, in West Africa and to show that, for West African Muslims, one effect of the Oil Crisis . . . has been to intensify a long-standing theological controversy,” Mervyn Hiskett, “The ‘Community of Grace’; and its Opponents, the ‘Rejecters’: A Debate about Theology and Mysticism in Muslim West Africa with Special Reference to its Hausa Expression,” *African Language Studies* 17 (1980) 99–140, at 115. It is worth noting that the progenitor of the *Jamā‘at al-faydā* constituted himself in historically Akbarian language “as *qutb al-aqtāb* and *khatm al-walāya al-muhammadiyah*” (“Pole of Poles” and “Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood”). The term *fayd* is, of course, the Akbarian term for emanation of Divine truth: “An important aspect of the sainthood of Alīmad al-Tijāni is *fayd*, *fayda* or *fayadān*: superabundance of divine favor which flows in an exclusive, direct, and private channel to the person of Alīmad al-Tijāni. One such *faydā* is the *Salāt al-fātiḥi*, one recitation of which, he was assured by the Prophet, equals the spiritual reward of six thousand recitations of the entire Koran.” The leader of the branch of the *Jamā‘at al-faydā* discussed by Hiskett, Ibrahim Niasse, “claimed to have received both the *faydā* and the ‘Greatest Secret’ of Ahmad al-Tijāni,” see Muhammad S. Umar, “Sufism and its Opponents in Nigeria: The Doctrinal and Intellectual Aspects,” in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (editors), *Sufism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999, 357–385, at 365–367. A study of the history of the *Jamā‘at al-Faydah* is Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

century Palembang by the scholar ‘Abd al-Şamad al-Pâlimbânî, with names like Ḥâbiṭîyyah, Awlawîyyah, and Samrahîtiyyah, who held that “the formal obligations of *shari‘ah* and worship had been lifted from them.”²¹⁸ We should not, however, make the mistake of assuming that to adopt alternative forms to those of majoritarian prescription is necessarily to embark on an *expansivist* trajectory vis-à-vis Truth. For example, the most demographically successful such group, the Nizârî Ismâ‘ilis (the contemporary disciples of the Aga Khan), have not considered it obligatory to perform the *salât* prayer as established by the example of the Prophet Muḥammad, or to fast throughout Ramadan, or to observe other forms in which the majority of Muslims, both Sunni and Shi‘î, enact Divine Truth. But, as Fazlur Rahman pointed out, the alternate truth of Nizârî Ismâ‘ilis is an extraordinarily authoritarian one inasmuch as members of the community pledge their fealty to the absolute truth-making authority of the living Imam, the Aga Khan, who is the sole and ultimate *prescriber* of what forms are and are not to be followed as meaningful and true.²¹⁹

The question of *to what extent* Islam is *truth unrestricted in form*—to use the Arabic term, to what extent is it *mutlaq*; or to what extent Islam is *truth restricted in form*—to what extent is it *muqayyad*; is the structural question that lies at the heart of inter-Muslim debates and contestations over what it is that constitutes orthodoxy in Islam. Questions such as how specific or singular law should be (that is to say, whether there is more than one valid answer to a legal question), as to how identical or variant creeds may be (that is, whether there is more than one valid creed), as to what specific forms rituals should take (whether there is more than one valid mode of performance of truth), are all, ultimately, questions about the relationship between the form of Truth and the meaning of Truth. The question of the relationship between form and meaning is also the central (if often unstated) question that informs the reformist discourses of modern Muslims. Attempts to reform—I repeat: *reform*—Islam in response to the exigencies and conditions of modernity invariably end up in the question: is the *form* in question—whether the old form or

²¹⁸ *terangkatlah daripadanya tasaif syar‘ dan sekali ‘ibadat*, I. Katkova, “Revising History of Sufism in Indonesia: 18th Century Treatise *Tuhfat al-râghibîn fi bayân-i haqîqat al-îmân* by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Samad al-Pâlimbânî,” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 13 (2007) 1–11, at 6 (compare Katkova’s translation at 8).

²¹⁹ Rahman issued the following severe assessment of the Ismâ‘ili location in regard to what I am calling “the tension between form and meaning”: “The Ismâ‘ili dogma is not so much of the equality of all religions but of the equal inanity of their positive content. This inanity, according to their doctrine, can be redeemed only through the adoption of an authoritative interpretation offered by Ismâ‘ilism. This is not liberalism but authoritarianism. (If this authoritarianism were removed, Ismâ‘ilism would be reduced to nihilism pure and simple),” Rahman, *Islam*, 177.

the new form (that is, the *re*-form)—Islam(ic) or not?²²⁰ For something to be a true and valid statement of Islamic value, (to what extent) must it be concentrated in a specific delimited (and historically received) form? Or, to reverse the perspective: to what extent is the Truth of Islam reduced or depleted or demobilized by restricting the expression of the Truth in a specific historically received form?

To take just one example, attempts by modern reformers to establish equal legal and social rights for women on Islamic terms have, in the first instance, routinely foundered on the Text of the verses of the Qur'ān that express what, in terms of modern Western-universalist discourse, might be called a “sexist” stance (or in more neutral terms, “androcentric”—for example the “witnessing verse” which states that a financial transaction should be witnessed either by two male witnesses or by one male and two females “so that if one of the two women should err, the other would remind her”²²¹ (which may be interpreted to mean that the testimony of a woman is of only half the probative value as that of a man), the verse that states “Men are in charge of women because God has given some of them [humans] excellence over others and because men have the liability for expenditure [on women],”²²² the related “inheritance verses” that lay down the share of a daughter as half that of a son,²²³ and the “*nushūz* verse” that permits a husband to physically discipline a recalcitrant wife²²⁴ (I am leaving aside here the much larger body of androcentric/“sexist” Hadith). “Feminist” and “modernist” readings of the Qur'ān have attempted to get past (or around) the specific restrictive *forms* prescribed in these Qur'ānic verses—as well as the various *fiqh*-laws elaborated on their value-premise—by seeking to discover and emphasize a larger *principle* iterated in the Qur'ān of the equality of all believers *qua* believers irrespective of gender (rather than allowing the afore-cited verses to be taken as indicative

²²⁰ The tension between principle and form is still central to Islam and lies at the heart of modern reformist debates in Islam. Abdulkader Tayob notes of two scholarly Muslim reformers both forcibly exiled into the Western academy, Fazlur Rahman and Seyyed Hossein Nasr: “The former is ready to jettison the forms in favour of the fundamental principles of Islam; while the latter regards the forms as effective symbols for relating to the divine,” Tayob, “Defining Islam in the Throes of Modernity,” 13. A contemporary Muslim reformer whose writings speak to the tension between principle and form is the Iranian intellectual and activist, Abdolkarim Soroush, whose fundamental ideas are now available in English in *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Islam* (translated by Nilou Mobasser; edited with analytical introduction by Forough Jahanbakhsh), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009.

²²¹ *an taḍilla iħdā-humā fa-tudhakkira iħdā-humā al-ukhrā*, Qur'ān 2:282 al-Baqarah.

²²² *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā'i bi-mā faddala Allāhu ba'da-hum 'alā ba'din wa bi-mā anfaqū min amwāli-him*, Qur'ān 4:34 al-Nisā'.

²²³ Qur'ān 4:7–12 al-Nisā' and 4:176 al-Nisā'.

²²⁴ Qur'ān 4:36 al-Nisā'.

of a generally inferior value for the female human being), as well as by attempting to restrict the ambit of these *formal* exceptions to this larger principle of gender equality to the specific pre-modern context into which the Text of the Qur’ān was revealed, and in which it was for centuries (patriarchally) interpreted.²²⁵ An objection to these sorts of (“feminist”)-reformist interpretations is that if one abrogates clear Textual *form* on the basis of an alleged underlying *principle* (even on the basis of a putatively Textual principle), then one undoes a knot that can rapidly unravel the entire fabric of Islamic forms. By and large, modern reformers (whether in the area of gender or elsewhere) are sensitive to this objection—they tend only to want to undo the particular forms to which they object, and to retain those to which they do not object (which latter may, nonetheless, be forms to which others object). However, this sensitivity leaves modern reformers vulnerable to the charge of hermeneutical inconsistency and selectivity: why allow only for the undoing of some forms on the basis of higher principle or meaning, and not for the undoing of others?²²⁶ Where to draw the line?

For example, when God *assumes* in the Qur’ān the existence in society of slavery and legislates with slaves in mind—that is, where God accepts slavery as an Islamic legal form—how does it make modern interpretive sense to do what all modern societies of Muslims have done and abolish slavery? The justificatory logic for the abolition of slavery is that the Qur’ān is understood to emphasize the ontological and spiritual (if not the legal) equality of all humans, and also encourages the manumission of slaves (an act for which divine reward is promised)²²⁷—also that the Prophet himself freed slaves—therefore the outright abolition of slavery is seen as a fulfillment of a higher divine/Pre-Textual value and purpose. The counter-arguments, that to abolish

²²⁵ There is now a large body of literature on this subject. A clear and concise summary of the issues and schematization of the various interpretive positions (with bibliographical reference to major sources) is Karen Bauer, “*The Male Is Not Like the Female* (Q 3:36): The Question of Gender Egalitarianism in the Qur’ān,” *Religion Compass* 3 (2009) 637–654; a thoughtful monograph is Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith and Jurisprudence*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

²²⁶ A bracing criticism of “modern Muslim feminists” is that of Ebrahim Moosa: “Muslim feminists make too much of a few verses of the Qur’ān that suggest reciprocal rights and duties between unequal spouses and then hasten to suggest that the Qur’ān advocates egalitarianism as a norm. In order to accept this one must pretend to be blind to the welter of evidence that suggests an outright patriarchy as the ‘textual’ norm. Generations of Muslim scholars have correctly stated that the Qur’ān advocates patriarchal norms, since that was the historical condition in which the Qur’ān was revealed. . . . [P]rivileging a few verses and then suggesting that these isolated and singular verses should control the meaning and interpretation of numerous other verses . . . is nothing short of hermeneutical acrobatics, or a hermeneutics of wishful thinking,” Moosa, “The Debts and Burdens of Critical Islam,” 125.

²²⁷ See Qur’ān 58:3 al-Mujādalah, Qur’ān 2: 178 al-Baqarah, and Qur’ān 24:33 al-Nūr.

slavery is to deny the Muslim his/her apparently God-approved right to own slaves (and is also to deny the slave-owning Muslim the right to expiate his/her sins by freeing slaves) seem not to have had much purchase in the sensibilities of modern societies of Muslims. Here, a Textual *form* has successfully been done away with as incompatible with the interests of a presumptive Higher or Pre-Textual *meaning*. Yet, the logic of applying the same principle—namely, the ontological and spiritual equality of all humans—to the question of the legal and social rights of women has not persuaded the vast majority of the modern practitioners of Islamic law to set aside the various received Islamic legal forms—whether received in Qur’ān, Hadith, or Text-based *fiqh*—that treat women differently to men. I should state clearly that, in making this analysis, I am taking no position on either the abolition or maintenance of slavery, nor on the affirmation or denial of equal legal and social rights to women. My point is rather to emphasize, in the first instance, that the arguments about re-forming both these issues are *schematically* about whether a Pre-Textual value (*hukm*) can be identified that abrogates the Textual form. In the second instance, as a human and historical matter, whether or not such an argument can successfully be made in any given context is critically contingent upon the Con-Text *in loco*—that is, on what elements of the Con-Text *in toto* are recognized and authenticated as of value in any given context. This, in turn, serves to point out the under-appreciated *contingency* of Textual interpretation on *extra-Textual* values: that is to say, in any given historical context where Muslims search for the Pre-Textual meaning of the form of the Text of Revelation, their hermeneutical engagement is embedded in a larger array of extra-Textual values present as the Con-Text of Revelation. The determining question, as noted earlier, would seem to be whether the hermeneutical trajectory adopted in a given circumstance or a given question tends more towards *reading God’s purpose from Textual sources into the (Seen/Unseen) world* or of *reading God’s purpose out of the (Seen/Unseen) world into Textual sources*. *Textual hermeneutics is not merely a focus on reading Text, it is also the reluctance to read Text in Pre-Textual mode*—including to read Text non-literally (that is, as other than “plain text”).

As far as I am aware, no modern reformer has attempted to play the philosophical card and to appeal explicitly to the categorical higher Truth-value of Pre-Text as trumping Text—what one might call, in emendation of the literary practice of “reading across the grain,” reading “across-the-Text” from/into Pre-Text. Such a trumping of Text by Pre-Text would be a manouevre that, if successful, would considerably reconfigure the hermeneutical terrain of contemporary Islam. Rather, the tendency of modern reformers has been to manoeuvre, to the extent possible, within the parameters (or grain) of the Text—

that is, to identify Pre-Text through and by the Text. In any case, in the present day-and-age, where the *paideia* of societies of modern Muslims is precisely *not* that of the philosophical-Sufi amalgam, Muslims' awareness of their philosophical, Sufi, and larger literary heritage—that is, of the full array of the Con-Texts of Revelation—is a relatively attenuated one. In this state of the historical eclipse and relative unavailability of the Con-Textual thought-tools and norms by which an argument might be made that appeals for its authority to the epistemology of the philosophical-Sufi amalgam, such an argument becomes a very difficult one to produce, and an even harder one to sell.



This brings us to the final point to be discussed before concluding this book; namely, how the conceptualization of Islam put forward in this book can help us better to conceptualize the human and historical phenomenon of *modern* Islam—as well as to conceptualize the relationship of modern Islam to what went before. A thorough study of the historical processes that have generated the Islamic modern is, of course, an undertaking hopelessly beyond the scope of this book: my purpose in the next few pages is briefly to highlight some of the major effects for the conceptualization of Islam of the encounters between Muslims and some of the component elements of the modern. My main purpose is to identify what I see as the fundamental differences between modern Islam and that which immediately preceded it. This will help us to understand the difficulties that modern Muslims have when attempting to conceptualize Islam in a manner that coheres both with their modern modes of being and with the pre-modern modes of being evident in the discursive and physical artifacts left them by their ancestors—it will help us to understand the fundamental difficulties that modern Muslims have in answering the human and historical question “What is Islam?”

In the foregoing, I have presented human and historical Islam, in the most mature phase of its pre-modern articulation, in what I have called the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (a complex of human societies constituted temporally, geographically, linguistically, and semantically). The Balkans-to-Bengal complex was the major paradigm of/for living Islam/being a Muslim immediately prior to the various *dis-ruptured continuities* effected by the encounters of societies of Muslims (including Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal paradigm) with the historical phenomenon that we know as *modernity*. The constitutive elements and physical dynamics of the *modern*—such as European colonialism and the emergence of the capitalist world-system; the formation of nation-states; the idea of the religious-secular binary; the rise of modern sci-

ence and its totalizing empiricization of the world; the accompanying phenomenon of what Weber called *Entzauberung* (literally: “the driving out of magic from things”) or “disenchantment of the world”;²²⁸ the spread of mass education; the proliferation of new technologies of communication from the printing press to the internet; the commodification of information; an increasing emphasis on the importance of the *purportedly* rational, objective public sphere over the purportedly emotional, subjective, private sphere; the (mythic) emphasis on egalitarianism over hierarchy; the strategic and lucrative importance of fossil fuels; *etcetera*—variously have worked, by processes of disruption, destruction, reaction, and production, to effect a re-constitution of the norms of societies of Muslims in such a way as to render modern Islam a normative configuration quite distinct from that of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex that preceded it.

My fundamental point here is that Muslims have, in making their modernity, moved decisively away from conceiving of and living normative Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation, and have, instead, begun conceiving of and living normative Islam primarily as hermeneutical engagement with Text of Revelation. In Islamic modernity, the cosmo-Revelatory *continuum* of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text is effectively fractured, the role of Pre-Text as a direct source for meaning-making is considerably delegitimated and delimited, if not almost entirely eliminated, and the range and scope and variety of Con-Text that is available for mobilization in meaning-making is considerably depleted.²²⁹ This depletion of Con-Text in the modern context has specifically affected those elements of Con-Text that are the historical products of hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text—that is, those elements of Con-Text that are the discourse of Truth- and Meaning-making from Pre-Text. These expressions in Con-Text of the hermeneutical engagements of Muslims with Pre-Text are today, by and large, simply not recognized as sources and modes of meaning-making in terms of Islam. Modern Muslims conceive of *Islam* in terms that are crucially different to how pre-modern Muslims conceived of Islam—different, that is, in terms of the focus, emphasis, and weightage of the hermeneutical engage-

²²⁸ Weber’s idea of the “disenchantment of the world” has been taken up with application to Islamic modernity in the insightful article of Francis Robinson, “Secularization, Weber and Islam,” in Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter (editors), *Max Weber and Islam*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 1999, 231–245.

²²⁹ I am aware that the foregoing is a large *generalization*, and would expect nothing less than for readers to object by citing exceptions to this general characterization (and, indeed, would be pleased to cite a few such exceptions myself)—nonetheless, I insist that as a *general characterization* of Islamic modernity (whether this general condition is conceived as pseudo-Hegelian *zeitgeist* or Foucauldian episteme) this is a sound and accurate descriptive statement.

ment with Revelation. Modern Muslims have largely lost the *routine hermeneutical habit* of making meaning in terms of Islam from Pre-Text and Con-Text of Revelation: modern Islam is, pre-dominantly, Islam of the Text of Revelation. Thus, when modern Muslims encounter statements of Islamic meaning that are made in terms of the hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text (the ideas of Ibn Sīnā or of Ibn ‘Arabī, the poetry of Hāfiẓ, miniature paintings, the wine-cup of Jahāngīr, etc.) they are, by and large, unable to recognize or make sense of these statements *as Islam*. The encounter between Muslims and the *force* of the definitive constitutive elements of modernity has, in various ways, resulted in the formation of a new species of human being, *the modern Muslim*, who conceives of his/her-self as a Muslim in terms of Islam that are crucially different to how pre-modern Muslims conceived of themselves as Muslim—precisely because the modern Muslim conceives of Revelation in a manner that is crucially different to how pre-modern Muslims conceived of Revelation. Modernity has resulted in nothing less than a reconstitution of the concept of Revelation that is, perhaps, best characterized in the parlance of business management as a *downsizing of Revelation* from Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, to Text more-or-less alone—or to Text read in highly-depleted Con-text. This modern downsizing of the terms of the hermeneutical engagement of Islam has rendered (the majority of) modern Muslims in a cognitive and epistemic condition where they are largely unable to establish a coherent conceptual relationship between modern Islam and pre-modern Islam: it has, in other words, rendered modern Muslims largely unable to conceptualize human and historical Islam.²³⁰

To the extent that the modern is a phenomenon authored, in the historical first instance, in the West, and experienced by Muslims, in the first instance, in the undeniable reality of successive military defeats incurring loss of geographical territory and political sovereignty, producing economic impoverishment, and general loss of agency, many of the foundational constituent elements of the modern impressed themselves upon Muslims by sheer force. The *encounters* of Muslims, from a historical position of relative weakness, with the powerful norms of the Western modern—as what David Scott, in a different context, has called “conscripts of modernity” (often, colonial conscripts)²³¹—resulted in a *re-calibration* and *re-constitution* of the dominant forms and modes of hermeneutical engagement in societies of Muslims.

²³⁰ As we have seen in Part 2, it is the same definitive norms of modernity—embedded in and allied to the self-justifying complex of power that Edward Said so importantly laid bare as ‘Orientalism’—that have also largely restrained specialists in the Western academy from conceptualizing Islam in a manner that maps onto the human and historical reality.

²³¹ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, Durham:

Thus, for important example, the self-demonstrating *power* of modern science (which was instrumental in the success of the military and capitalist project of European colonialism) with its fundamental epistemology of the *empiricization* of reality—that is, its constitution of the *real object of knowledge solely as that which can be empiricized*—generated in societies of Muslims (as it did in societies of non-Muslims) a turning-away from the idea of the Unseen World as an accessible object of real knowledge alongside the Seen world, and a turning towards the Seen World as the valid and accessible object of real knowledge. The reaction in societies of Muslims to the “disenchantment of the world” and the empiricization of reality has been not to deny the *existence* of Unseen/Pre-Text, which is vouchsafed in the Seen/Text of Revelation, but rather to deny the *knowability* (and thus the *actionability*) of the Unseen/Pre-Text *other than by* means of the Seen/Text of Revelation. This position is not new in and of itself—as we have noted in Chapter 5, the notion that the Unseen/Pre-Text is unknowable other than by means of the Seen/Text is the dominant view of the pre-modern projects of *fiqh*-jurists’ law and of *kalām*-theology. Islamic modernity here (and elsewhere) has taken the form of Muslims seizing on particular elements in the received Con-Text of Revelation that most cohere with the dominant norms of the modern. *What is new and modern*, then, is not the idea that the Pre-Text is unknowable save through the Text, but is rather the fact that this conceptualization of reality has, by force of the encounter with the Western modern, become the *dominant conceptualization of Islam in the Islamic modern* (although there exist pockets and currents of resistance to this conceptualization, some of which have been cited in the foregoing).²³²

This *re-calibration of the human relationship with reality* has led modern Muslims to the intellectual, practical and social *depreciation and invalidation of the authority and Truth-value of the practices and discourses of the Pre-Text*—philosophy and Sufism—and the concomitant *appreciation and validation of the authority and Truth-value of the practices and discourses of the Text*—law

Duke University Press, 2004. Scott is drawing on Talal Asad, “Conscripts of Western Civilization,” in Christine Ward Gailey (editor), *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond, Volume 1, Civilization in Crisis: Anthropological Perspectives*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992, 333–351. It is worth bearing in mind that the single state that ruled over the largest and most geographically diverse population of Muslims in history was probably the British Empire between 1857 and 1947, whose Muslim colonial subjects extended from peninsular Malaya to India to West Africa to British Guyana.

²³² I have cited some of these in the course of developing my argument, drawing mainly on the literary discourses of Muslims in South Asia, such as the ongoing performance of the poetry of figures such as Khwājah Ghulām Farīd and Bullhē Shāh—and the ongoing investment of these discourses with normative Islamic value by a number of South Asian Muslims.

and creed. The “disenchantment of the world” has, for modern Muslims, taken the form not so much of a driving out of “magic” from the world as it has a *driving out of the Pre-Text from knowledge*—and thus of a driving out from Con-Text of the artifacts and vocabulary of Pre-Textual epistemologies and truths. Fundamental among the epistemological means and truthful meanings of Pre-Text that have been *disqualified* as constitutive of the means and meanings of modern Islam are the claims of the Pre-Textual epistemologies of self-standing reason (philosophy), and of self-standing holistic psycho-physical experience (Sufism) to be modes of knowing Divine Truth—to be modes of Islam/Islamic. Whereas the pre-modern Textual projects of *fīqh*-jurisprudence and *kalām*-theology existed historically in a social-discursive context alongside and in constant conversation with the normative Pre-Textual projects of philosophy and Sufism (as we have seen exemplarily in the *fatwā* of Ebū-s-Su‘ūd on the Sufi divers in the deep ocean of Divine Truth)—a conversation carried out both between Muslims and within individual Muslims—and also existed alongside the various explorative literary-fictional discourses grounded in a philosophical-Sufi amalgam and expressed in the language of metaphor and paradox, today these Pre-Textual discourses and practices have mostly exited the normative stage leaving that space to be populated by the (reconstituted) epistemologies and discourses of Text alone. This is evidenced precisely in the historically unprecedented predominance in the discourses of modern Muslims of the epistemologies and prescriptive concerns of law and creed, and the unprecedented marginality in the discourses of modern Muslims of the epistemologies and explorative concerns of philosophy and Sufism.²³³

The *reason-ing* of Text as distinct from the reason-ing of Pre-Text—the “reading out of the Text into world” as distinct from the “reading out of the (Seen and Unseen) world into the Text”—has (pockets of resistance notwithstanding) acquired something approaching a monopoly over the *means to modern Muslim meaning*. For something to possess a value or meaning in terms of Islam today, that value or meaning must, by and large, be validated in terms of the reasoning of projects of hermeneutical engagement with the Text. Thus, when contemporary Muslims speak of such modern projects as

²³³ An analysis of defining features of the transformation of Islamic discourses well worth reading is that of Abdulkader Tayob, *Religion in Modern Islamic Discourse*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009: “The nature of belief as faith in the unseen (*ghayb*) had been transformed into a belief in that which could be measured and proved in history . . . Religion (*al-din*) in the modern reformulations lost its complexity and ambiguity with regard to individuals . . . Islamic modernism seemed to have completely jettisoned or underplayed the role and place of subjectivity,” Tayob, *Religion in Modern Islamic Discourse* at 71.

“Islamic economics,” or “Islamic banking” or “Islamic finance,” the “Islamic” value of these modern discourses and practices is overwhelmingly constituted by reference to the principles and prescriptions of the text of Qur’ān and Hadith as interpreted in the historical *fiqh* discourse, rather than by reference to, for example, the human and social values expressed in books of *akhlāq*-ethics (which, it should be noted, routinely contained discussions of economics). The relative conceptual and methodological narrowness of the definitively and self-consciously modern (even “cutting-edge”) projects of “Islamic economics” and “Islamic finance” when it comes to thinking about and constructing the value *Islamic* is highly symptomatic of the thought practices of the modernity of Muslims at large.²³⁴

The effects of the orientation of meaning-making away from Pre-Text and towards Text are also revealingly illustrated in the modern reconstitution and *domestication* of Sufism from an *explorative* project of the Self to a *pietistic* or *quietistic* project of the Self; that is, the reconstitution of Sufism from being a private-public²³⁵ explorative undertaking carried out on its own epistemological bases to *make* Truth and Meaning from the Pre-Text (where the words of the Text are subjected to readings that bring them into existential accord with the Truth and Meaning of the Pre-Text),²³⁶ to Sufism as a private-individual project of *affirming* prescriptive Truth and Meaning made on the epistemological bases of the legal and creedal discourses of hermeneutical engagement with Text. Much of what passes for Sufism in the modern world would, I venture, barely be recognized as such by the major Sufi figures of the past—or would be recognized as something like “Sufism for beginners.”

What about philosophy on the terms in which it was conceived of by the foundational figures of Islamic philosophy—namely, as the science of universal Pre-Textual truths to be known through reason? The force of the paradigmatic re-constitution of the modern world in terms of the binary domains of religious and secular, with religious being the separate domain for that which

²³⁴ For a sharp critique of contemporary “Islamic finance,” see Mahmoud El-Gamal, *Islamic Finance: Law, Economics and Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. For a survey of the development of the modern discourse of “Islamic economics,” see Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

²³⁵ The reader will recall the term “private-public” from Chapter 5. The Sufi act of meaning-making is personal in that it is made in the self, public in that it is communicated to others, and private in that it is communicated to a limited and graded public.

²³⁶ The reader will recall from Chapter 1 Ibn ‘Arabī’s reading of the Qur’ānic verse “Your Lord has determined that you will not worship other than He,” to mean *not* that God has *commanded* that nothing be worshipped other than Him but rather that God has *established as an accomplished fact* that *any* act of worship was *necessarily* directed to Him alone, and thus, “in every aspect of worship,” *including idolatry*, “there is an aspect of God.”

is not scientific human reason (i.e., the domain of Revelation) and secular being the separate domain for the exercise of scientific human reason (i.e., of philosophy and natural science) has led—even when the binary has not been accepted outright in modern societies of Muslims—to the undermining of the claim of projects of reason to be acting in the same domain and with regard to the same goods as projects of Revelation. Thus, the truths of modern science are accepted as true, but are deemed separate “in nature” from the truths of Revelation: separated, the truths of modern science may serve as the instruments of Textual truths, but do not possess the epistemological standing on which to dispute the territory of Textual truths. And, thus, philosophy is rendered a definitively *suspect* undertaking of dubious and irrelevant, if not outrightly false, credentials for the making of meaning in terms of modern Islam. One is hard-pressed to find instances today in the societies of Muslims of what al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā would have recognized as philosophy: the no-holds-barred subjection of the Text of Revelation to the universal Pre-Textual Truth of the Revelatory Reason of the cosmos. Philosophical epistemology (in the Fārābīan or Avicennan mode) exercises relatively little influence on dominant paradigms of contemporary discourse in societies of Muslims.

Basically, modern Textual reasoning views philosophical Pre-Textual reasoning as insufficiently Textual (and, thus, as excessively rational), and Sufi Pre-Textual reasoning as both insufficiently Textual *and* insufficiently rational to be Islam(ic).

The *downsizing of Revelation* from Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, to Text (more-or-less) alone has resulted in a contraction of the crucial effects of what was identified in Chapter 5 as the *multi-dimensionality* or *spatiality of Revelation*. The reader will recall that the spatiality of Revelation is the structural elaboration of the hermeneutical engagement with different sources of Revelation (Pre-Text, Text, Con-Text) by different epistemologies in different disciplinary projects, each issuing in different Truths and Meanings of Revelation that are *spatially-arrayed* in a social *hierarchy* of truth and in a social *exteriority-interiority* of truth—that is, in acknowledgedly different forms and calibrations and isotopes of truth for different persons and places. These spatial principles of *hierarchy* and *interiority* however, are scarcely concepts with positive normative appeal in the modern condition with its foundational myths of human *equality* and universal enfranchisement animating the ideal of the *public sphere* as a space which holds the promise of the capacity of reason to convince the general public of truth²³⁷—effectively, a vindication of

²³⁷ The foundational treatments of the relationship between the emergence of the value of the reason of the public sphere and the emergence of the modern are those by Reinhard Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, Cambridge: MIT Press,

reason through the popular, and of the popular through reason. Modern society, made *public* by the technologies of print and internet, is the society of avowedly egalitarian public discourse. The fundamental pre-modern axiom of public discourse and public reason in societies of Muslims, “Speak to people according to the capacity of their intelligence [*kallimū al-nāsa ‘alā qadr ‘uqūli-him*],” is not likely to get one very far as a slogan in the modern public sphere. It is striking that this axiom presents itself as the very opposite of the slogan of the modern political Islamists: *al-dīn basīt*, “The *dīn* is simple”:²³⁸ rather, it proclaims that the *dīn* is anything but *basīt*.

The notion that a social hierarchy of truth might provide for possibilities of complex meaning that a social egalitarianism of simple truth cannot accommodate is an argument which, in the modern context, would likely be repudiated and rejected as “elitist”; which, of course, it is—but with “elitism” construed in the one instance as a positive quality and, in the other instance, as a negative one. Nonetheless, whether or not one subscribes to the pre-modern logic of the confining of more complex truths to private society on the grounds that the very complexity of these truths is likely to derange and disorder the society of the general public (and putting aside the practical feasibility of the application of such a principle in the modern age of information technology), it is rather difficult to argue that the very *public*-ness of discourse in modern societies of Muslims has led to an *expansion* in the normative possibilities of discourse and living in terms of Islam. If the numerous notorious recent examples are anything to go by, it would appear that the public sphere in modern societies of Muslims has, on the whole, emerged as an intimidating and censorious space where speech-acts that contradict or challenge monovalent prescriptive norms are more likely to be persecuted by the public or prosecuted by the state for blasphemy than to be received with equanimity and explorative interest.²³⁹ Further, I suggest that the importance of the idea and norms of the public sphere to the constitution of the idea and norms of the modern (the modern being a condition stately governed by the

1998 (originally published as *Kritik und Krise: Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1959); and by Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence), Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989 (first published in German as *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Darmstadt: Hermann Luchterhand, 1962).

²³⁸ This is a slogan that I heard regularly during my undergraduate years in Cairo.

²³⁹ There is, sadly, no shortage of examples of such prosecutions, but a particularly salient one for the present book is that of the Egyptian academic, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943–2010), one of the few modern Muslim scholars to make a thoroughgoing scholarly attempt at reconceptualizing the textuality of the Qur’ān, who was forced into exile as a result. The offending monograph is Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ: dirāsah fi ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-‘Āmmah al-Miṣriyyah li-al-Kitāb, 1990.

public sphere) has in and of itself resulted in the conditioned privileging by modern Muslims of the norms and values of the public over the norms and values of the private as normatively constitutive of Islam—even of Islam as lived in the private sphere. Existing, as they do, in a paradigm that self-constitutively privileges public reason over private reason, modern Muslims are cognitively less able and practically less likely than were pre-modern Muslims to assert, for themselves and for each other, the privilege of a normative Islam of private space to contradict a normative Islam of public space while remaining constitutive of *Islam*. Indeed, they are less likely to think or make this assertion even when they are in private.

Alongside the relocation of discourse to the public sphere, another important reason for the relative intolerance of contradiction in societies of modern Muslims is the relative loss in modernity of the linguistic consequences of the engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text. By this, I mean the radical diminution in the routine communicative practices of societies of modern Muslims of those forms of linguistic expression—namely, metaphor and paradox—necessary to express ambiguity, and thus necessary to accommodate, in cognitive and discursive coherence, the lived condition of meaningful ambivalence and contradiction that issues from the hermeneutical engagement with the multi-dimensionality of Revelation. The literary-fictional discourses of the Sufi-philosophical engagement with Pre-Text, and the expression of the truths of the Pre-Text in metaphor and paradox—the canonical works of Hāfiẓ, Sa‘dī, Jāmī, Rūmī, Bīdil, *etcetera*—are no longer at the heart of the educational formation of a vast complex of Muslims from the Balkans to Bengal: they are no longer the *paideia* of societies of Muslims. The Con-Text of the heavily metaphorized and paradoxical *lingua franca* of the contradictory and complex normative truths of this discourse is *not* the language and idiom of meaning-making of modern Muslims. The fact that the literary-fictional iterations in the language of metaphor and paradox of the Sufi-philosophical engagement with the Pre-Text are no longer to the same degree at the cognitive and expressive forefront of the discourses of Muslims means, quite simply, that *modern Muslims are far less cognitively habituated than were their pre-modern predecessors to thinking and speaking about Islam in terms of contradiction,²⁴⁰ and thus to making meaning for themselves in terms of Islam as ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction*—capacities that, had they been

²⁴⁰ This is an idea that I first put forward in oral remarks at a panel on “Censorship and the Imagination,” at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Orlando, Florida, 16–19 November, 2000, a panel that was organized by colleagues at the American University in Cairo precisely to discuss the larger meaning of the attempts by members of the general public, by the Egyptian government, and ultimately by some administrators and faculty at the

retained, might have served Muslims well in the modern re-location of meaning-making to the public sphere.

I disagree fundamentally with the assessment of Francis Robinson who argued in regard to societies of Muslims that “the changes in the technology of communication—particularly of print and the shift it helped to bring from orality to literacy . . . enabled individuals to command knowledge as never before and assisted them in the process of exploring their inner selves” leading to “the emergence of a reflective reading of the scriptures and the development of an increasingly rich inner landscape.”²⁴¹ In my assessment, print contributed to the *exteriorization* of discourse for two reasons: first, print oriented meaning-making away from its meaning for the inner self and towards its effectiveness in the public sphere. Second, print proliferated in the very period that witnessed the turning-away from the discourses of hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, which resulted in a depleted Context, and thus in a *less* “reflective reading of the scriptures.” These two trajectories, in my view, have led modern Muslims not to “an increasingly rich inner landscape,” but to a poorer one.

I disagree also with Aziz al-Azmeh when he says, on the basis of the historical jurisprudence governing non-Muslims (what is called *fiqh al-dhimmah*), that *because* the “classical law and Muslim practice . . . was inequitable in its legal underpinnings—therefore not quite what we might understand as pluralistic today . . . classical Muslim historical experience presents us with a set of precedents of plurality and pluralism which would not be recognisable to modern notions of pluralism, or which would provide ‘sources of inspiration’ for them.” From this premise al-Azmeh argues “that a notion of pluralism arising from these shadowy historical memories, real or contrived, is not useful for the present purposes of Muslim society . . . I find the rhetoric of pluralistic indigenism . . . harmful.”²⁴² In my view, rather than dismiss, on the basis of “classical law” and “legal underpinnings,” the Muslim historical experience as lacking “sources of inspiration” for modern pluralism, it is much more “useful” for us to turn our attention to the historically

institution, to censor the teaching of certain books in the Arabic literature curriculum at the American University in Cairo in the fraught academic year 1998–1999.

²⁴¹ Robinson, “Religious Change and the Self,” 107 and 105. Elsewhere, Robinson speaks of “the adoption of print which enabled Muslims . . . to begin, as never before, the exploration of their inner selves.” Francis Robinson, “The British Empire and Muslim Identity,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 (1998) 271–289, at 287; see also his discussion of “Interiorization and Religious Change” in Francis Robinson, “Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia,” in Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, 66–104, at 93–96.

²⁴² Al-Azmeh, “Pluralism in Muslim Societies,” 11, 14.

pervasive conceptualization, formulation, expression, and circulation, in the literary-fictional self-expressions of Muslims, of truth beyond the law *in and as* metaphor and paradox. We have seen *these* pluralistic truth statements iterated and reiterated in the prolifically circulated literary works cited in the preceding chapters, such as in the positive valorization of idol-worship, or in the calling of God by the names of Hindu deities. And we have omitted entirely to mention one of the most famous of such motifs, that of the devotion of a Muslim lover to a non-Muslim beloved, celebrated in the famous story from the *Conference of the Birds* [*Manṭiq-ut-Ṭayr*] by Farīd-ud-Dīn ‘Attār, of the pious Shaykh San‘ān who fell in love with a Christian girl and became her swineherd—which is a very different sort of *fiqh al-dhimmah*. I submit that these discourses provide a rich indigenous resource of historical “Muslim practice,” as well as Muslim ideals, that may well be mobilized by modern Muslims for the cultivation of pluralism—precisely because this discourse is a thought-mode and idiom of flexibility and of coherent contradiction that, as we have already iterated, assumes the multi-dimensional and plural nature even of a single truth.

A primary agent in this “turn” away from Pre-Text and Con-Text has, of course, been the transformation in the content of normative education in modern societies of Muslims, as well as the dramatic expansion in the demographic scale of the new mass education. The education of Muslims *in the modern* (in both senses of the phrase) has been constituted primarily in the epistemological terms of the Western modern and at the expense of the epistemological norms of the pre-modernity of Muslims—and has been one of the most important factors in the formation and proliferation of the norms of Islamic modernity.²⁴³ If we turn to the Balkans-to-Bengal complex in particular—the paradigm for human and historical Islam that I took as the exemplary focus for this study—we find that one reason for the retreat of the Pre-Textual discourses of the philosophers and the explorative Sufis is, in fact, simply the *loss of language*, which is, in turn, a direct effect of two of the Prime Movers of modernity, colonialism, and nationalism. Whereas in the pre-modern period, the educated elite of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex would, as a matter of course, have been proficient in reading texts in Arabic and Persian—a member of the Ottoman social class, an *Osmanlı*, was, for example, defined by his knowledge of the “three languages [*elsineh-i selâseh*]”: Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman; and an educated member of the North Indian Muslim *shurafā’* of the late Mughal and early British colonial period would,

²⁴³ On changes in the constitution of education and their broader effects, see Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam*, 157–162.

as a matter of course, have studied Arabic, Persian, and Urdu—this is no longer the case.²⁴⁴ Persian, the foundational language in which the truths of normative engagement with Pre-Text were most prolifically formulated and communicated in poetry and narrative as *Islamic truths*—in the canonical works of Hāfiẓ, Sa‘di, Jāmī, Bīdil, *et alia*—is today routinely taught in schools only in those nation-states where it is the native/“national” language (Iran, Tajikistan, and war-ruined Afghanistan). Persian is simply no longer the language of self-cultivation and written communication of educated Muslims from the Balkans-to-Bengal. In Turkey, the teaching of Persian in schools has been done away with by the self-consciously modernizing nationalism of the secular Kemalist state (whose larger rupturing of the cognitive connections of the Anatolian peoples with the integrality of their Islamic past has gone far beyond anything effected elsewhere by British and French colonialism); in Central Asia it was devastated as a part of the general cognitive deracination of societies of Muslims wrought by the rule of the Communist state; in South Asia, it was gradually eroded by British colonial educational policies, and then finally put paid to by the nationalist state educational policies of Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi governments (in South Asia, Persian is today routinely taught only in *madrasahs*—and even then, in a relatively restricted literary scope). As such, the rich fictional discourses of the millennium of Persian-language hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, and the ideas, attitudes, dispositions, and sensibilities contained therein are effectively no longer an immediate, accessible and active part of the Con-Text in places where, just a few generations ago, they were a central component of the *paideia* that formed *selves* and that informed the conceptual language and values by which those selves interacted with each other in society. The oceanic Persian-language Con-Textual discourses of Muslims’ engagement with the Pre-Text have shrunk like the Aral Sea leaving behind only the dusty traces of its former depth and fertility. Along with its diminution, the Persian-language corpus of the Con-Text of Revelation has also undergone a *parochialization*—as the vast corpus of ideas produced in Persian largely by Sunnīs in a variety of locales from the Balkans to Bengal are read today in two main

²⁴⁴ My own maternal grandfather, who was born in 1898, as a subject of the Queen-Empress Victoria, into a landowning family of *sayyids* and *hakims* (medical practitioners) in Bijnor in the United Provinces of British North India (which, in the lifetime of his grandfather, had been annexed by East India Company from the last Muslim king of Avadh, Vājid ‘Alī Shāh), who received his formative education in his father’s household before going on to study modern medicine in Agra at the Thomson School of Medicine established by the East India Company to train physicians for its army, and who died in Lahore as a citizen of the nation-state of Pakistan in 1973, read all of Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and English—something that none of his six children (and only one of his twelve grandchildren) did/does.

limited trajectories: in a perennial narrative myth of *Iranian* national identity reaching back to the dawn of civilization,²⁴⁵ and/or in the idiosyncratic local inflection of the society and polity of the post-Revolutionary Shi‘i Islamic Republic of Iran. The loss of Persian as a *trans-continental* language of the vast complex of discourse and meaning-making of educated Muslims from the Balkans to Bengal, and its reconstitution as what, in historical terms, is a *local language* of nationalism and nation-state, is probably the single most important factor in the historical *disintegration* of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex as a discursive and semantic space characterized by a common paradigm of Islamic life and thought articulated through a critically overlapping discursive canon, conceptual vocabulary, expressive motifs and channels of communication.

Simply, the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, which was the geographically and demographically dominant paradigm of conceptualization of Islam prior to the modern irruption, no longer exists as a *meaningful* formation. Further, what is almost more important for our purposes than the historic disintegra-

²⁴⁵ A fine example of this parochialization of Persian in modern historiography is Roy Mottahedeh's very successful book *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* that seeks to explain modern Iran to a western readership, and that identifies Persian language discourse with the notion of a perennial "Iranian culture" belonging to (a presumptively continuous nation of) "Muslim Iranians" who are set apart by this Persian discourse from other Muslims—set apart even from those non-Iranian Muslims whose relationship to this Persian language discourse is, as we have seen, one of full possession, production, and self-constitution. Thus, Mottahedeh speaks of how "Persian poetry came to be the emotional home in which the ambiguity that was at the heart of Iranian culture lived most freely and openly" and of how "ambiguity . . . was also the register in which the Persian-speaking Iranians could talk and yet keep an emotional distance from the Turk and the Mongol who ruled them" (the peculiar implication, here, being that Turks and Mongols are somehow less capable of ambiguity than are the subtle Persian-speaking Iranians). Mottahedeh is pleased to note that "the cultural power of Persian literature and Persian poetry in particular was shown when the Turks of Anatolia and of Central Asia, the Muslims of India and even of areas further east . . . turned to Persian models when they created literature in their own languages," adding that "this vast area, from Turkey to Indonesia . . . had received an Islamic cultural mode with a distinctly Persian flavor" and "continued to look to Iran as a model for high culture; and for them (as for Iranians) the most vivid proof of this cultural preeminence was Persian poetry." Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, 164–165, and 161–162. I strongly question, however, whether non-Iranian peoples of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex identified Persian poetry with "*Iran* as a model for high culture" any more than they identified the Arabic *Qur'an*, or the Arabic-language discourses of the universal academy of Islam, with an *Arabian* model of divine truth or of scholarship. I suggest that Persian poetry was construed by the educated Muslim elite of the Balkans-to-Bengal as a universal language of meaning-making belonging fully, integrally, and enfranchisedly to the Persian-reading Muslims of Balkans-to-Bengal complex as a whole (as was Arabic-language scholarship, or the the Arabic *Qur'an*, construed as belonging to all readers of Arabic) in a manner whereby Hāfiẓ and Sa‘dī of Shiraz were understood less meaningfully as *Iranian* poets than they were as *Islamic* poets—and whereby Bidil and Ghālib of Delhi were also understood less meaningfully as *Indian* poets than they were as *Islamic* poets.

tion of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is the extremely impoverished *memory* of it in its successor domains. The notion of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex plays very little role in the self-narratives of its successor societies—and *the notion of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex as a paradigm of human and historical Islam* plays next to no role at all anywhere. In a sense, we might say that the idea of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex—as an expression of the contradictory capaciousness of the explorative potentialities of meaning-making in terms of Islam—is today a part of the Con-Text of engagement with the Pre-Text of Revelation that is in eclipse, waiting either to be mobilized in the contemporary making of meaning in terms of Islam, or to slip into further desuetude.

Indeed, as noted above, one of the most consequential effects of the modern downsizing of Revelation has been the concomitant downsizing of the Con-Text of Revelation; that is, the downsizing of the rich and complex and contradictory lexicon of meanings of Islam that have been elaborated down the centuries by generations of Muslims. Vast swathes of the historical hermeneutical engagements of Muslims with the Pre-Text—philosophical, Sufi, ethical, aesthetical, and other discourses—have, in the modern context, simply been disqualified from the Con-Text of Revelation and deemed as having no salient role in meaning-making in terms of Islam. At worst, these elements of the Con-Text are put outside the pale of modern Islam, and at best they are accommodated by modern Muslims (as they are by Western scholars) under the normatively disenfranchising rubric of “culture” rather than of “Islam.” It is telling that even the most radical Muslim attempts at the modern re-form of Islam do not, by and large, draw significantly on the Con-Textual reservoirs of philosophical, Sufi, ethical and aesthetical Muslim meaning-making as *Islamic* norms. The overwhelming bulk of modern reformist discourse has largely stayed within the parameters of the epistemology of Textual-legalism, rather than take up what our seventeenth-century Javanese author called the “difficult” and “perilous” path of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam—the latter having become a language with fewer and fewer speakers, and thus a language carrying less and less meaning for societies of Muslims.

A widely-held notion in the study of modern Islam is that a definitive historical change resulting from the spread of print and mass education that sets off modern from pre-modern Islam is the “erosion of the authority of the ulama as interpreters of Islam” and their replacement by “any Ahmad, Mahmud or Muhammad” who could now “claim to speak for Islam”²⁴⁶—the idea being that “today new Islamic intellectuals challenge the ulama’s mo-

²⁴⁶ Robinson, “Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia,” 80–81.

nopoly over the interpretation of Islam.”²⁴⁷ In my view, this widely-held definitive notion begins from the mistaken premise that the ‘ulamā’ enjoyed anything approaching a monopoly over the interpretation of Islam in pre-modern Islam in the first place.²⁴⁸ Rather, as we have seen, no such monopoly ever existed: certainly, as we have amply seen in this book, in pre-modern societies of Muslims the interpretation of Islam was the portfolio of the educated classes at large who confidently and forcefully took in hand the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text to make meaning in terms of Islam in a diffuse array of discourses, practices and media. In my view, the more significant change in the modern period is not so much the loss of ‘ulamā’ authority as it is the profound change in the content of the *paideia* of the modern educated classes—specifically and crucially in the depletion from the *paideia* of the discourses and epistemologies and habits of meaning-making from the Pre-Text, and the emphasis on the discourses and epistemologies and habits of meaning-making from the Text. I thus disagree with Dale Eickelman when he says of the advent of modern education as against “mosque-university” education that now, “freed from mnemonic commitment, religious knowledge”—that is, the undertaking to “interpret what Islam ‘really’ is”—“can be delineated and interpreted in a more abstract and flexible fashion.”²⁴⁹ Putting aside the (in my assessment, erroneous) assumption that the pedagogy of state-prescribed education in the bulk of the modern Islamic world is not heavily mnemonic, in my view what matters is less the fact of mnemonics than the textual object of mnemonics. If one takes a flexible, abstract discourse—such as the historical *paideia* of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam—as one’s mnemonic object, one is going to be flexible and abstract *because* of one’s mnemonics, not in spite of it. With the contraction of Pre-Text and Con-Text in the modern, Muslims for whom the field of meaning-making in terms of Islam is the socially and discursively diffuse explorative engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation are an anachronistic and increasingly rare species. I detect little evidence that

²⁴⁷ Robert Hefner, “Introduction: The Culture, Politics and Future of Muslim Education,” in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (editors), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 34 (this is a representative quotation: a number of authors could have been cited expressing the same view).

²⁴⁸ This idea of the pre-modern “ulama’s monopoly over the production and delivery of religious knowledge” is becoming routinized in the various fields of scholarly literature; this phrase is from Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, London: Routledge, 2007, 312; see also the representative characterization of the pre-modern “formulators and administrators of cosmological frameworks . . . the ‘ulama’” and the modern emergence of “a class of ‘new Islamic intellectuals’ or *Lumpenintelligenzia*,” in Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, 11 and 47.

²⁴⁹ Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, 168.

“what Islam ‘really’ is” is being interpreted in a less abstract and more flexible manner in the modern world (and to the extent that it is, this is not happening on an especially significant or socially consequential scale).

The Con-Text that does play the major seminal role in the modern re-imagination of Islam is, of course, the first century of Islam: the modular period of the Prophet, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (the Rāshidūn), and the Salaf. The nature and significance of the turn (or putative *return*) to the first century has, of course, been extensively studied. When framed in terms of the concept of Islam put forward in this book, the turn to the first century may be seen as a radical marginalization of the vast bulk of the complex and contradictory historical Con-Text of Revelation. The turn to the period of the Prophet and Rāshidūn as the modular age is effectively an attempt to simplify Islam by de-historicizing it—that is to say, it is an attempt to do away with the complicating effects of the long historical Con-Text of Revelation. It represents precisely an attempt by modern Muslims to uncomplicate human and historical Islam by re-locating Islam to a moment before Muslims had the opportunity to complicate it with their various and contradictory attempts at meaning-making down the centuries.

This modern gravitation towards the prescription of the uncomplicated is particularly evident in the cleaving of modern Muslims to the Prophetic Hadith—the Textual corpus collected in the first centuries of Islam by a sector of the community of Muslims, the “Hadith-folk,” and invested by their methodology with a superior claim to historical authenticity. The Hadith corpus claims authoritatively to report accurate information about the Prophetic and Rāshidūn periods; it is forcefully prescriptive and detailed in its articulation of Islam, and is far-reaching in its prescriptive ambition. It tells you in no uncertain terms and in precise detail what Islam is and what forms Islam takes—and, thus, what forms a Muslim must adopt and follow in order to be a Muslim (hence its appeal to legalist discourse). The modern legalist and Textualist embrace of the Hadith project is dramatized in the obdurate resistance of the preponderance of modernist discourse to projects of historicist criticism (by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike) of the historical authenticity of Hadith.²⁵⁰ It is also evident in the concomitant unwillingness to admit into evidence such materials from the historical memory projects of Muslims other than Hadith as were not primarily concerned with authoritative prescription—such as epic Prophetic biography (*sīrah* and *maghāzī*), history (*tārīkh*), and Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*). The contents of these other early discourses—

²⁵⁰ On historicist criticism of Hadith by Muslims in the modernity, see Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

which also record the memories and normative understandings of Muslims in the first centuries about the earliest period of Islam—are often at variance with the contents of Hadith; they present an image of the community of the first century of Islam that is considerably more complicated and contradictory than is congenial for the modern Muslim construction of the modular age. As an act of *selective* historical memory, the particular modern turn to the age of the first generations of Islam is, in considerable measure, an act of historical intervention and invention that makes the age of the Prophets and the Rāshidūn uncomplicatedly modular precisely by defining Text and down-sizing Con-Text.²⁵¹

The modern focus on Text, and on discourses of prescription over discourses of exploration, has been reinforced, as noted earlier, by the modern re-location of the lives of Muslims into the existential context of another defining component of the modern, namely the nation-state, with its enormous emphasis on *law* as the fundamental value-constituent of human society. The emergence, in the modern world, of nation-states has required the reconstitution of Islam in terms of the nation-state—a factitious entity gotten-up by law (and, in the Islamic world, an especially recent entity and identity)—whether by constituting the state as Islamic by the adoption of Islamic law (as in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan), or by constituting the state in terms of the new taxonomy of the secular-religious binary by the rejection of Islamic law (as in the Republic of Turkey). Since the state is entirely a law-made entity—the reader will recall the statement of Talal Asad that “the modern state describes itself as the law state”—in those places where the modern state is constituted as Islamic this is necessarily on the basis that its *laws* are Islamic (and where it is not, this is necessarily on the basis that they are not). In such a circumstance, an enormous *definitive and constitutive authority* is necessarily vested in *legal discourse*—every law becomes an act of defining and constituting Islam, the state, *and, thereby, the Muslim citizen*. In those places where the state is constituted as “secular” in terms of the modern

²⁵¹ Striking is the poor reception (at best neglect, at worst outright hostility) accorded to the research of Muslim scholars who have attempted to write alternative histories of the early period of Islam based on a broader range of historical memory materials, such as Khalil ‘Abd al-Karīm, *Shadw al-rabābah bi-ahwāl mujtama‘ al-ṣahābah*, Cairo: Sīnā, 1997; also Khalil ‘Abd al-Karīm, *Quraysh min al-qabilah ilā al-dawlah al-markaziyyah*, Cairo: Sīnā, 1993; and Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Qimni, *Ḥurūb dawlat al-rasūl*, Cairo: Madbūli al-Ṣaghīr, 1996; also Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Qimni, *al-Ḥizb al-hāshimi wa ta’sis al-dawlah al-islāmiyyah*, Cairo: Madbūli al-Ṣaghīr, 1990. On the historical significance of the constitutive differences between the memory projects of Prophetic biography (*sīrah* and *maghāzī*), history (*tārīkh*) and Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), see Shahab Ahmed, “The Problem of the Satanic Verses and the Formation of Islamic Orthodoxy,” PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1999; and my forthcoming *The Problem of the Satanic Verses and the Formation of Islamic Orthodoxy*.

“religious-secular” binary (where Islam is relegated to the private space of the “religious” as the domain of ultimately non-rational private faith as opposed to rational public argument), Islam is once again defined and constituted by the *legal* act of the state which constitutes Islam as “not-law,” and that constitutes the state itself as not-Islamic on the basis of law—one might say that, in such a circumstance, Islam is *made by law* although it is not *made of law*. Alternatively, a secular state may allow for the application of what it calls *shari‘ah/Islamic* law in the domain of private or personal status law, but not in the domain of public law: here, Islam is being constituted *by* and *of* law—but as the law of a delimited sphere constituted by the state. In both these iterations of secularism by the state, it becomes difficult for cognitive resistance to the secular paradigm to take a form other than the reactionary insistence that Islam *is* law—or, rather, that Islam *is law*. The overall effect in these various modern conditions is for law to become, by sheer *gravitas* and gravitational pull, the most important discourse definitive and constitutive of modern Islam and of Muslims—with the self-definitional and self-constitutional attention and pre-occupation of the thought-activity of Muslims being irresistibly drawn towards engagement with legal discourse with its preoccupation with prescription and proscription, and its stark classificatory concern with “permissible” and “impermissible” (*halāl* and *ḥarām*) as the pre-eminent criteria of meaning-making.²⁵² It is not merely that the modern state is the “law state,” but that modern society—including modern societies of Muslims—is the “law society,” and the modern person is the “law person” or *homo juridicus*. The force of this existential condition of the “law society”—particularly when unleavened by the presence and proliferation in the conceptual and communicative habits of that society of the explorative discourses of engagement with Pre-Text routinely rehearsed and reiterated in the literary-fictional registers of ambiguity, ambivalence and contradiction; namely, metaphor and paradox—has the effect of creating and routinizing larger cognitive habits of conceptualizing Islam in monovalent terms of prescription as opposed to multivalent terms of exploration. All this has ultimately resulted in a diminished modern capacity to *conceptualize contradiction and difference as Islam* and thus to *live with contradiction and difference as Islam*.²⁵³

²⁵² Armando Salvatore has written suggestively of the modern “implosion of *shari‘a* into a disciplining metanorm of the public sphere,” arguing that this “new *shari‘a*” possesses a “capacity to influence normative discourse in the public sphere and its chances and alleys of institutionalization through notions claiming a central place within Islamic traditions,” Salvatore, “The Implosion of *Shari‘a* within the Emergence of Public Normativity,” 126.

²⁵³ Also (as has been widely noted in the scholarship) the normative force of the modern Western conceptualization of law as a codified entity has resulted in an increasing shift in modernity towards *codified* Islamic law—a remaking of *fiqh*-law in the image of the normative

Finally, it should be noted that there have, of course, also been purely serendipitous (or, according to one's perspective, calamitous) factors that have also helped to shape the Islamic modern. For instance, the rise in a relatively unimportant part of northern Arabia in the eighteenth century of Wahhābism, an aggressively anti-Pre-Textual and anti-Con-Textual form of Islam, followed by the accession to power in the Arabian peninsula by the adherents of this movement in the early twentieth century, followed in turn by the discovery of copious quantities of the most strategically critical and financially lucrative modern commodity in the Arabian peninsula, the funds from which have entrenched the power of the Sa‘ūdi Wahhābī state and supported the propagation of this anti-Pre-Textual creed worldwide, is a series of events that (the early twentieth-century machinations in Arabia of the Great Powers notwithstanding) has little to do with the rise of modernity in post-Enlightenment Europe. Wahhābism's hostility to the philosophical-Sufi amalgam²⁵⁴—to the idea and practice of the truth-economy of the Pre-Text—is most forcefully expressed in its anathemization of the practice of tomb-visitation, while its larger hostility to the built-up edifice of meanings that is Con-Text is dramatized in its disregard (if not contempt) for the history of Muslims other than the modular early community, and of the Wahhābis themselves. Both of these Wahhābī values have been demonstrated in the physical destruction by the Saudi state of the built urban environments of the historical cities of Mecca and Madinah, where a vast number of old buildings and other spaces constructed by Muslims over the course of the last 1400 years have been summarily razed, bulldozed and built over as being of no value (that is, of no value worth preserving)—or, indeed, as being of negative value.²⁵⁵ The Wahhābī vision is exemplified in the area immediately surrounding the Ka‘bah itself—as seen in Figure 12, which shows the physical dwarfing of the precincts of the Ḥaram by high-rise luxury hotels and an enormous clock-tower. During the course of clearing the immediate vicinity of the Ḥaram and of digging the foundations for these high-rises, traces of various structures from the earliest period of Islam—including what was suspected to be the

Western modern—that has resulted in the contraction even of the possibilities of plural interpretation within Islamic law.

²⁵⁴ This is economically summed up by Esther Peskes: “Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb . . . succeeded in establishing a specific definition of the faith, one which entails a comprehensive conception of Islamic knowledge, obligatory action and individual responsibility to the complete exclusion of Sufism and its institutions,” Esther Peskes, “The Wahhābiyya and Sufism in the Eighteenth Century,” in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (editors), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999, 145–161, at 161.

²⁵⁵ See Irfan Ahmed, “The Destruction of the Holy Sites in Mecca and Madinah,” *Islamica* 15 (2005) 71–74.



FIGURE 12. Photograph taken from within the Masjid al-Harām in Mecca in 2013, showing the Ka'bah dwarfed in the eye-line of worshippers by the Burj al-Bayt, a structure built in the 2000s comprising seven towers, and containing a shopping mall, four hotels (Raffles, Fairmont, Swissotel, and Mövenpick), and 900 private apartments, as well as a lunar observatory and a clock tower visible from 20 miles away (Courtesy, the Islamic Heritage Research Foundation, Mecca).

house of the Prophet Muḥammad's first wife, Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, which was Muḥammad's residence in Mecca in the first years of his Prophet-hood (and a site where he received Divine Revelation)—were unearthed, but promptly filled in and built over²⁵⁶ (see Figure 13). To the extent that the erstwhile built environment of Mecca and Madinah—not just structures associated with the Prophet and the early community, but mosques and *madrasahs*, tomb-shrines and Sufi centers—expressed the Con-Textual historical investment with value and meaning of these two cities by the global Muslim community, so does the destruction of the two cities express the repudiation by Wahhābism of this physical and environmental depository of the human and

²⁵⁶ See Anonymous, "The House of Sayyida Khadija in Mecca," *Islamica* 15 (2005) 76–77; and the study by Ahmad Zaki Yamanī, *Dār Khadījah bint Khuwaylid radiya Allāh 'an-hā fi Makkah al-mukarramah*, London: Mu'assasat al-Furqān al-Islāmī, 2013.



FIGURE 13. Photograph of a structure identified as the house of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, first wife of the Prophet Muḥammad, which was the residence of Muḥammad in the first years of his Prophethood. Uncovered near the Ka'bah during the 1998 expansion of the precincts of the Grand Mosque, the site was filled in and built over by the Saudi authorities (Courtesy, the Islamic Heritage Research Foundation, Mecca).

historical Con-Text of Islamic meaning.²⁵⁷ The destruction of the physical traces of even the modular Salafi community—the first three generations of Muslims of whom no significant physical memory is allowed to remain (ex-

²⁵⁷ The author of an article entitled “Madrasas in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources,” politely notes, “The subtitle of this article was chosen for a number of reasons, the most important of which is that an archeological or art-historical study of the madrasahs founded in Mecca prior to the Ottoman annexation of the Hijaz in 923/1517 is impossible, given that absolutely no vestiges of the 23 madrasahs mentioned below survive today. Although we do know that some of these foundations remained extant until the middle of the twentieth century, most, if not all of them disappeared during the ambitious expansion projects undertaken in the Meccan Haram by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia beginning in the 1950s. Numerous other structures of historical importance in the neighborhood of the Great Mosque were also destroyed to make way for vast municipal development projects,” Richard T. Mortel, “Madrasas in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 60 (1997), 236–252, at 236–237. In another article, this time on Sufi hospices, Mortel writes, “an archeological or art-historical study of the 59 *ribāts* known to have been founded in Mecca before the Ottoman takeover of the Hijaz in 923/1517 is impossible seeing that, with a single exception known to this writer, no vestige of the *ribāts* mentioned herein remains today . . . Although we are certain that a number of these institutions did remain until the middle of the twentieth century, most if not all of them disappeared,” Richard T. Mortel, “*Ribāts* in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61 (1998), 29–50, at 30.

emplified in the razing of the graveyard of the Companions of the Prophet; see Figure 14)²⁵⁸—reifies the contraction of Con-Text to textual re-membrance alone. Further, in the measure that this built historical environment had consisted of artifacts that configured the truth-economy of the Unseen Pre-Text and served as the sites for the enactment of Pre-Textual Truth (such as tomb-shrines, graveyards and Sufi *khānqāhs*), the destruction of these edifices expresses the repudiation of the truth-economy of the Unseen Pre-Text. Certainly, the sense of *value* that is expressed by the image of the Ka'bah set diminutively amidst the concrete colossi of the “multi-national” corporate hospitality industry is not that of the truth-economy of Pre-Text and Con-Text—but of an empirically very different type of economy and value.

The modern destruction of Mecca and Madinah thus serves as something of a physical metaphor for the cognitive and imaginal condition towards which modern Islam as a whole is tending as regards the meaning of the environment of its past. The modern Muslim visiting Mecca and Madinah today, who takes in hand a pre-modern guidebook to Mecca or Madinah, will simply not be able to *locate the terrain* in which his predecessors walked;²⁵⁹ similarly, a modern Muslim if shown an image of pre-Wahhābī Mecca or Madinah will not *recognize* the townscape.²⁶⁰ The modern Muslim visitor will find next to no trace in Mecca and Madinah of the built-up meanings of Con-Text, and will be unable to make meaning there in terms of Con-Text. The destruction

²⁵⁸ In Figure 14 (top), the large mausoleum on the left (bearing the Arabic numeral 2) is the mausoleum of the Prophet's grandson, al-Hasan b. ‘Ali (625–670), and of the fifth and sixth Shi‘i Imāms, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (676–733) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765). The structure at the front (number 3) is the mausoleum of the Prophet's daughters, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthūm; immediately behind it (number 4) is the mausoleum containing the graves of all of the Prophet's wives, except for Khadijah bt. Khuwaylid and Maymūmah bt. al-Ḥarīth. The large structure at the far end (number 8) is the mausoleum of the third Caliph ʻUthmān b. ʻAffān (d. 656, the previous mausoleum on this site was built by Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Ayyūbi/Saladin in the twelfth century). The most distant structure (number 10) is the burial place of Mālik b. Anas (d. 795), the eponymous founder of the first legal school of Islam (the previous mausoleum on this site was restored in 1543 by the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman, though himself of the Ḥanafī *madhab*). See Mehmet Bahadir Dorduncü, *The Yıldız Albums of Sultan Abdülhamid II: Mecca–Medina*, Somerset: Light, Inc., 2006, at 125–126. A fuller description of the contents and structures of the *Jannat al-baqī* before its destruction may be gleaned from ‘Abd-ul-Ḥamīd Qādirī, *Justujū-yi Madīnah: tā’rikh, ‘umrāni irtiqā’, fażā’il o mahāsin, tabarrukāt-i nabaviyyah ash-sharifah va ăşār-i Madīnah zāda-hā Allāh sharafan va majdan*, Lahore: al-Qalam, 2002, at 597–645.

²⁵⁹ See the sentiment expressed by Shafiq Morton, “The Birth and Imminent Death of a Sacred Meccan Site,” *Islamica* 15 (2005) 78–80.

²⁶⁰ A visual sense of the scale of the physical transformation in Wahhābī modernity of the cities of the Prophet, as a result of the elimination of historical buildings, may be gleaned from a perusal of the photographs of destroyed buildings collected in ‘Abd-ul-Ḥamīd Qādirī, *Justujū-yi Madīnah*; from the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century images reproduced in Dorduncü, *The Yıldız Albums*; and in Farid Koumgui and Robert Graham, *A Photographer on the Hajj: The Travels of Muhammad ‘Ali Effendi Sa‘udi* (1904/1908), Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009.

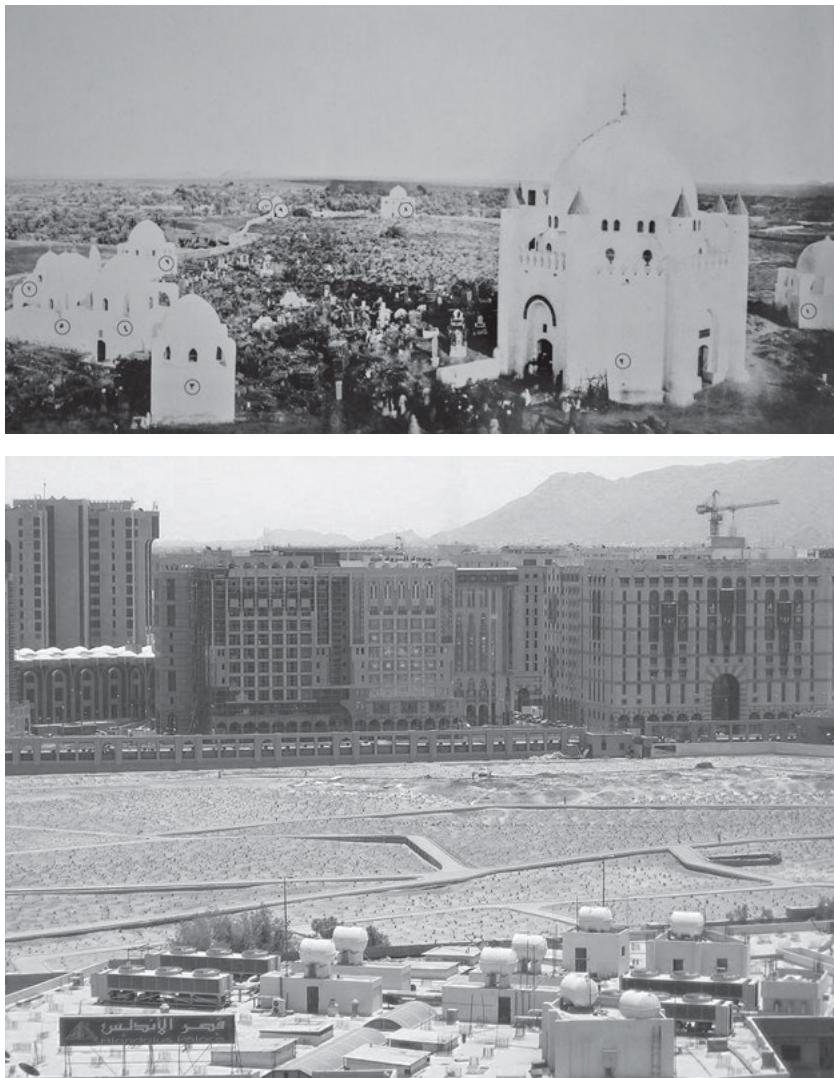


FIGURE 14. (Top) Photograph of the *Jannat al-baqī'* (*Baqī' al-gharqad*), the graveyard in Madinah of the Companions of Prophet, taken *circa* 1880 before its built structures and gravestones were destroyed by the Wahhābī Sa'ūdī state in 1926 (the mausolea in the photograph were all re-built in the nineteenth century, after the original structures were destroyed or damaged in the first Wahhābī-Sa'ūdī occupation of Mecca in 1806). For the identity of some of the structures, see footnote 258. The photograph is from the Yıldız Albums of the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd-ül-Hamid II (Courtesy, Harvard University Library). (Bottom) Photograph of the *Jannat al-baqī'* in Madinah in 2008 (Wikimedia Commons).

of Mecca and Madinah takes the Muslim back to the Year Zero of the Wahhābī present, and offers the Muslim engagement with Revelation little or no material Con-Text on which to draw beyond the second-hand edifice of the Western modern. The Saudi Wahhābī state has effectively carried out what we might call a double Year Zero policy, where the meaningful inscription of the built environment of the past is erased by a “present-ist” (in the sense of that which is present as the “here”) overwriting of the Pre-Text of the Unseen, and by a “presentist” (as in that which is present as the “now”) Year-Zero overwriting of the Con-Text of the Seen. One wonders if the relative indifference to and/or equanimity with which modern Muslims have accepted the physical destruction of the two most symbolically and ritually meaningful cities of Islam suggests the degree to which the vision of Wahhābism is not merely a cause, but also a symptom of the broader condition of the Islamic modern.²⁶¹



To sum up, then, modernity has—or, rather, Muslims in modernity have—reconstituted and recalibrated human and historical Islam by giving emphasis to Text over Pre-Text and Con-Text, and thus to law over other discourses of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, to prescription over exploration, to public over private, to egalitarianism over hierarchy, to literal thought over metaphorical and paradoxical thought. The considerable loss of the multi-dimensional spatiality of Revelation is increasingly the *leitmotif* of modern Islam—and is precisely what makes it difficult for the practitioners of modern Islam to conceptualize pre-modern Islam in a manner that coheres with a human and historical phenomenon that they conceptualize as Islam.



Finally, before moving on to conclude what I am saying in this book, I shall here take the opportunity to clarify a few things that I am *not* saying—but that, I suspect, I shall very likely be accused of saying.

²⁶¹ One also wonders whether, should this destruction of Mecca and Madinah have been carried out not by the Saudi state but by a European colonial power, it would have been received by Muslims with the same degree of relative indifference and/or equanimity. What has happened elsewhere in the Islamic world in the past decade, such as with the destruction of the built historical environment of Timbuktu by the Mouvement pour l’Unité et le Jihad en Afrique et de l’Ouest in 2012, or the bombing of tomb-shrines throughout Pakistan by groups such as the Tehrik-i Tālibān-i Pākistan, or (as this book went to press) the destruction of the historical legacy of Iraq and Syria by al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyyah fi al-‘Irāq wa al-Shām (ISIS/ISIL/*Da’ish*) is informed by and expressive of the logic of the Wahhābī physical repudiation of Pre-Text and Con-Text.

First, I am not saying that Islam is utterly incommensurable with other human and historical phenomena. Rather, I am saying that Islam is a sufficiently distinct phenomenon as best to be conceptualized and understood, in the first instance, on its own terms—that is, in terms of itself (and that by not doing so, we fail, precisely, to discern what is crucially distinct about it). My hope is that, in undertaking a conceptualization of Islam in and on its own terms, we have been made not only productively to interrogate the concepts and terms of reference by which Islam is usually conceptualized, but also that our conceptual gains and re-orientations may be brought productively to bear when we turn to (re-)conceptualize other phenomena.

Further to this, and second, I am not saying that a particular phenomenon, if made meaningful in terms of Islam, cannot simultaneously be meaningful in other terms. As we saw in the case of the Sikh wrestler, and the Hindu courtiers, and Maimonides, something may meaningfully be Islamic and meaningfully be something else at the same time. Indeed, the point is that the fact of it also being something else does not prevent it from being Islamic.

Third, to reiterate something I said at the outset of Chapter 5, I am *not* saying that “Islam is whatever Muslims say it is” (which, I have noted, is descriptively useful but conceptually inadequate), nor that “whatever Muslims say or do *is* Islam,” but rather that we should approach *whatever* Muslims say or do as a potential site or locus for expression and articulation of *being Muslim*—and thus look at each those statements and actions with eyes wide open to how these sites are meaningfully formed and informed by the hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation that is Islam. I have sought to conceptualize Islam in a capacious manner that is attentive to and inclusive of the widest possible range and loci of self-statement of *being Muslim*.

Fourth, it should not be imagined that I am in any way suggesting that prescriptive discourses and trajectories, including the discourses of *fiqh*-law and prescribed practices of worship and piety such as the Five Pillars, are not of vital importance to the human and historical phenomenon of Islam, and thus to a coherent conceptualization of Islam. What I *am* suggesting, in no uncertain terms, is that prescriptive discourses and trajectories are not definitively constitutive of Islam, and that to formulate a coherent conceptualization of Islam, these prescriptive discourses and trajectories must be viewed alongside the full palette of non-prescriptive trajectories and discourses—what I have been calling the explorative trajectories and discourses of Islam.

Fifth, I am not suggesting in any way that pre-modern Islam is somehow more authentically Islam than is modern Islam. Rather, I am saying that modern Muslims engage with Revelation on critically different and reduced her-

meneutical terms to pre-modern Muslims—terms which, by their difference, make it difficult for modern Muslims to conceptualize the complexity of pre-modern Islam as Islam.

Sixth, despite my efforts to elucidate the complexity and richness of pre-modern Islam, mine is not an agenda of nostalgia. This is certainly not to say that I reject nostalgia out of hand as a valid and instructive value: we should not dismiss outright the possibility that some things about the “good old days” might indeed have been good. But to read this book as a thesis of nostalgia is to have it argue for the positive value of such pre-modern norms and practices of hierarchy as gender inequality and slavery—which I, really, am not doing.

Similarly, and seventh, the emphasis in this book on the Sufi-philosophical amalgam, and on the *madhab-i ‘ishq*, should not be misconstrued as an attempt to present what, in contemporary discourse of relations between Muslims and the West, is often called the “soft” face of Islam. To the contrary, I have no interest in peddling an over-irenic picture of Islam, or of Muslims, to the West—or, for that matter, to Muslims. I have no interest in presenting Islam as in any way compromising a rigorous, principled, combative, and unyielding opposition to injustice and oppression—I am not putting forward any notion of a “turn-the-other-cheek” Islam, even if it be a rosy cheek.²⁶² I have been trying here to present a way of *meaningfully* qualifying the fullest range of the expression of human living with the term and value *Islamic*. Thus, I have sought to show how we may speak both of art and of violence as meaningfully *Islamic*.

Eighth, while learned readers will doubtless have found it possible regularly to interject at various points in the foregoing presentation of “What is Islam?” to say: “But such-and-such a Muslim does not agree with this,” this objection, while no doubt factually correct in each individual instance, misses the point. Of course, Muslims disagree about what is and is not Islam. What I have been seeking here to do is not to conceptualize Islam in terms of agreement, but in terms of disagreement: *to show what makes those disagreements cohere*. The conceptualization that I have presented is external/etic to the human and historical phenomenon at stake in that it does not privilege any single self-designation as Islam—but is nonetheless internal/emic to the phenomenon in that all self-designations fit into the conceptualization. The chal-

²⁶² As a straightforward historical point, there is, of course, nothing inherently irenic about Sufism. For example, the Safavid movement in Iran began as a Sufi order, the soldiers of the Ottoman Janissary corps were routinely members of the Bektashi Sufi order, and, of course, military resistance to European colonialism in various places—including West Africa and the Sudan—was carried out by Sufi movements.

lenge has been to conceptualize in a way that accommodates the “hard” or “thorny cases”—those instances and examples which our thought habits are unable to domesticate, and which we consequently tend to exclude or to relegate as not (properly) “Islamic.”

Ninth, it may be objected that my conceptualization applies only to mature Islam and does not correspond to early or primitive or proto-Islam. This is also to misunderstand. My point is that the very features that make it difficult for us to recognize mature Islam as Islam on the terms of primitive Islam arise directly out of the inherently multi-dimensional and multi-spatial structure of the foundational phenomenon of Divine Revelation to Muḥammad. The mature Islam of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is the working-out of the *potentialities of the structure* of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text that is present *ab initio* in the Muhammadan phenomenon. Pre-Text is present *ab initio* because the Text comes from some Truth behind and beyond the Revelation (in whatever forms the seventh-century West Arabian Arabs may have conceived of this), while Con-Text is made, *ab initio*, first in the Text’s interpretation of itself, second, in the re-constitution by and in the Text of pre-Islamic elements with new Islamic meaning, and, third, by the engagement of the speaker and audience of the Muhammadan revelation, the first hermeneutical community, with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text.

Tenth, and finally, it might further be objected that the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is an exceptional case that does not apply to other times and places—especially to Arab Islam. In one limited sense, of course, this is correct: the Balkans-to-Bengal complex is a specific historical phenomenon—albeit a very large and important one—characterized by specific features, such as the fact of Persian-language discourse being a major vehicle for the conceptualization and communication of the meanings of Islam in the complex. I am not saying that everywhere *is* the Balkans-to-Bengal: there are, of course, differences across time and space—and I want neither to make too little of the differences, nor too much of them. Rather, I am saying that the Islam of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, by fact of it being the mature expression of the working out and articulation of the multi-dimensional, polysemous, polyvalent and contradictory potentialities and complexities of the inherent structure of Revelation, enables us to see the phenomenon at stake (Islam) more fully—and thus enables us to theorize and conceptualize Islam in a way that does Islam and us more justice. Further, and crucially, the values of ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction that are so richly articulated in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex are not historically confined to the Balkans-to-Bengal; they are also abundantly present in the Arabic discourses of Muslims *before* the emergence

of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex²⁶³—and, in the considerable measure to which societies of Arab Muslims (many of whom lived for centuries under Ottoman rule, and in engagement with Balkans-to-Bengal norms and paradigms) continued to think and experience their lives in the framework of the Sufi-philosophical amalgam, these values remained present in these societies down to the advent of the modern. Since the greatest challenge to the dominant conceptualizations of Islam/Islamic is posed, above all, by the refusal of the prolific social and discursive manifestations of ambivalence and contradiction to cooperate with our conceptual habits, I have made the consideration, precisely, of *these* values central to my diagnostic reconceptualization of Islam. Moving forward, it should now be possible for us to transport the theoretical and conceptual lens that we have fashioned in the Balkans-to-Bengal, so as to bring it to bear upon other societies of Muslims in other times and places. I am sure, the refraction of light through this lens will help to bring *Islam* into clearer view and focus and coherence in these other times and places—and will help us better to conceptualize and understand *in terms of Islam* the meaning-making of pre- and extra-Balkans-to-Bengal societies and individuals.

²⁶³ See Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität*.

The Importance of Being Islamic

What account of my deeds, to anyone, could I give?
All the questions were wrong; what answers could I give?

—Munīr Niyāzī (1928–2006)¹

THIS BOOK HAS SOUGHT to put forward a conceptualization of Islam as theoretical object and analytical category that maps meaningfully onto Islam as a human and historical phenomenon—a human and historical phenomenon characterized and constituted, not merely by immense variety and diversity, but by the prodigious presence of outright contradiction. This book was provoked by the sense that the existing conceptualizations of Islam—whether as religion, as culture, as civilization, as discursive tradition, as core beliefs, as whatever-Muslims-say-it-is, as a law-centered phenomenon, as so plural and various as to be “islams-not-Islam,” *etcetera*—have in various ways failed to convey the fullness of the reality of what it is that has actually been (and is) going on in historical societies of Muslims living *as Muslims*.

This book has sought to conceptualize Islam in terms by which differences, including outright contradictions, may be seen as arising directly and structurally from and thereby as cohering meaningfully with the object Islam with which those differences are identified by their authors and protagonists. It has sought to conceptualize Islam, not by elimination of difference but by inclusion of difference. In seeking to conceptualize Islam in terms that map onto the human and historical reality wherein Muslims have authored and lived with contradiction *as Islam*, this book has sought to locate the logic of difference and contradiction as coherent with and internal to Islam—that is, to provide a coherent account of contradiction in and as Islam.

This book has located the logic of contradiction in Islam in the very idea and phenomenon that is the *fons et origo* of human and historical Islam: Revelation to Muḥammad from the Unseen God. It has presented a re-

¹ *kisī kō apnē ‘amal kā hisāb kyā dētē?/ savāl sārē ghalat thē javāb kyā dētē?* Munīr Niyāzī, *Ēk awr daryā kā sāmnā* (Kulliyāt-i Munīr), Islamabad: Dōst, 2008, 479.

conceptualization of Revelation that locates the structural relationship between the spatial components of the communicative phenomenon of Revelation, namely, the Unseen and the Seen, and has demonstrated the consequences of the structure of the Revelatory phenomenon for those people who commit themselves to the Truth of the Revelatory phenomenon. Conceptualizing and naming the primary component sources of Revelation as Pre-Text and Text provides us with a vocabulary that enables us to *see* and *understand* how commitment to and engagement with Revelation can be and is, in good faith and reason, conceived of as engagement with a source of Truth other than the Text of Revelation. This, in turn, enables us to see and understand the prolific and various Muslim engagements with the Pre-Text of Revelation *as Islam*.

Once we are able to conceptualize Muslim engagements with Revelation as engagement with the limitless Pre-Text of Revelation—and not only with the delimited Text of Revelation—we become able further to conceptualize Muslim engagements with Revelation as *explorations* of Pre-Text in search of Truth and Meaning. We thus become able to see how the Islam of a Muslim, or of a society of Muslims, may consist not merely or even primarily in discourses and practices of prescription, but also and significantly in discourses and practices of exploration. This enables us further to see and understand the engagements of Muslims with Revelation as taking place in diffusion in society in a range of discursive and praxial media of exploration of Truth and Meaning, such as fictional literature, art and music. We have seen how the products of these engagements with Revelation enter into social circulation as statements and practices made meaningful in terms of Revelation, the full semantic assembly or semiosphere of which statements of meaning comprise what we have named the Con-Text of Revelation. The Con-Text of Revelation is the lexicon of the available vocabulary of Islam in terms of which, in any given historical context, Muslims engage with Revelation to make further statements of Truth and Meaning—that is, to make further Con-Text, which is further Islam.

This book has drawn attention to and focused on the mutually constitutive relationship between Islam and Muslims: on how Islam makes Muslims as Muslims make Islam. Islam is conceptualized here as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation: as the act of meaning-making for the individual and/or collective self from the various sources of Revelation. Changing the terms of the language in which we conceptualize Islam serves, as we have seen in the foregoing, to bring into focus constitutive and defining features that are obscured or put out of focus by other conceptualizations and categories. In particular, this conceptualization enables us to

see the inherent structural spatiality of Revelation as hierarchy and as interiority/exteriority, a spatiality expressed in different sources for truth, different modes of production of truth, or different methodologies and epistemologies, different meanings and values of truth, different social locations or social theatres for the operation of truth and meaning and value, and different expressive registers of truth-, meaning-, and value-discourse, or different types of language used to communicate different types of truth, meaning and value—all differentiated according to hierarchy and exteriority-interiority. Conceptualizing Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text, thus brings into view and focus the fact that meaningful ambiguity and meaningful contradiction are inherent to, and arise directly from, the structural spatiality of the very phenomenon of Revelation itself. This, in turn, draws our attention to the importance of the social and discursive means by which Muslims entertain and maintain contradiction: primarily by conceptualizing both social space and language in terms of a hierarchy and interiority/exteriority of truth: a social hierarchy of knowers, public and private discursive space, metaphor and paradox. We are thus able to see with far greater urgency and clarity the constitutive centrality to the human and historical Islam of social organization, physical space, and language, and thus to address ourselves to analyzing societies of Muslims in these terms. Recognizing the inherent spatiality of Revelation also brings into focus the central question of the relationship between form and meaning that lies at the heart of all hermeneutical engagement by Muslims with Revelation.

Conceptualizing Islam as meaning-making for the Self in terms of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation cultivates in us the cognitive and analytical habit of looking for Islam in discursive and praxial diffusion: in the full range of thought and action by which Muslims engage with sources of Revelation and with the Con-Textual language of its meanings. It enables us to detect and recognize Islam not just in the usual places where our received cognitive and analytical habits lead us, but where it actually is present in discourse and praxis as means and meanings. Conceptualizing Islam as meaning-making for the Self in terms of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text also enables us to recognize that *all* acts and statements of meaning-making for the Self by Muslims and non-Muslims that are carried out in terms of Islam—that is, in terms of any of Pre-Text, Text or Con-Text—should properly be understood as *Islamic*. To do otherwise is to impoverish and distort the *meaning* of those acts and statements—which are rendered less meaningful than they actually are precisely in the measure that it is Islam, the hermeneutical

engagement, which gives them meaning—and is, thus, to impoverish and distort the meaning of Islam.

Conceptualizing Islam as means and meaning enables us to ask meaningful questions. The basic question to be asked when we confront any given phenomenon or object or statement is: what meaning is added by qualifying that phenomenon or object by the word *Islamic*? (How) does the term *Islamic* enhance or clarify the constitution of that phenomenon, object or statement? Obversely, how does *not* using the term *Islamic* deplete or distort the constitution of the phenomenon, object, or statement? By consistently and insistently asking these questions—as has been done in this book—we become able to bring into view a previously occluded field of phenomena of meaning that encompasses thought, sensation, imagination, experience, prescription, exploration, wonder, predicament, aestheticization, differentiation, agreement, disagreement, ambiguity, ambivalence, contradiction, *etcetera*, all standing in relation to each other in meaningful terms of Islam. By consistently and insistently asking these questions we push ourselves to look closely at, and thus begin to discern as meaningful in terms of Islam, things from which we otherwise withhold such meaning. The hope and challenge is that, by setting ourselves the task of interrogating the constitution of these phenomena and their relationship to each other in meaningful terms of Islam, we become able to identify and ask new questions that have hitherto been uncontemplated—uncontemplated, because we have not recognized the presence and nature of the phenomena to which those questions should be addressed. Some such questions have been asked in this study, and new and meaningful answers have been forthcoming; answers that have enabled us to see Islam differently, more fully, and more meaningfully—and in a manner that is a truer expression of the human and historical phenomenon at stake. The hope is that further questions will elucidate further answers that more fully bring to light and enfranchise the rich range and relation of meanings that is the human and historical phenomenon of Islam. The hope and challenge is to recuperate the full range of meanings that arise from the hermeneutical engagement that is human and historical Islam: to grasp the full range of meanings that the word *Islamic* can and does designate.

The primary goal of this book has been to provide a conceptual means by which *not to* impoverish, distort, fracture, obscure, mis-calibrate, reduce and otherwise render incoherent the human and historical phenomenon of Islam—and thus, by the same token, to provide a conceptual means that serves to bring into focus and recognition all forms and tokens and calibrations and expressions that are Islam. This book has sought not so much to

define, as to *bring into definition*—to bring into view, to discern and to *descriy*—Islam in its plenitude of meaning. Islam, meaning-making for the self by one-fifth of humanity, is *Islam*—it is not anything else—and should be conceptualized, understood and appreciated as such; in terms which cohere with its meanings and by which its meanings cohere. By not employing language appropriate to the meaning at stake, and thus by not recognizing Islam for what it is, we—Muslims and non-Muslims—at best misrepresent, and at worst commit an outright injustice to the human and historical existences and endeavours of one-fifth of humanity. We also do an injustice to ourselves by preventing ourselves from apprehending and benefiting from what those existences and endeavours have to offer us by way of understanding and experiencing the human predicament, as well as from apprehending and benefiting from what those existences and endeavours have to offer us by way of making meaning for ourselves. Let us understand, apprehend and benefit from the importance of being Islamic.

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ISBN: 978-0-691-16418-2



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